2 FANTASTIC FREE GIFTS!

2 COMICS! JUDGE DREDD & GIANT-SIZE SIDEKICK

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COMIC HEROES

KILLER HEROES ISSUE

WOLVERINE

HOW HE CHANGED COMICS

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- HIS ORIGINS!

MOVIE SPECIAL!

DREDD AGAIN

"HE'S THIS INCREDIBLY TOUGH COP IN A CRAZY, DANGEROUS WORLD"

AND! MIKE ALLRED • GREG PAK • STEVE NILES • KILLRAVEN • THE VICTORIES • DOCTOR WHO • THE GLORIOUS RETURN OF GLYN DILLON • AND AXEL ALONSO EXPLAINS MARVEL NOW!

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SUPER-SIZED!

Amazing things are happening in the world of comics. At DC, the New 52 continues to build momentum, with a new range of titles imminent; at Marvel, something similar (but not the same!) is kicking off under the label Marvel NOW! In this issue of *Comic Heroes*, there're fresh things to be learned about both.

But comics is a wide world, and a broad church, and we're equally excited about plenty of stuff that might *not* be making quite such a big 'ping' on your radar. Amongst these, the most exciting new creative team for a *Doctor Who* comic in years; one of comic book god Walt Simonson's most ambitious projects in an age; and a new movie for Judge Dredd, Britain's most important comic book hero. We've great stuff on all of these and more – like the amazing new graphic novel from Glyn Dillon – in these pages too.

Every issue we strive to make *Comic Heroes* better, and this time out we're feeling rather pleased with ourselves: not only does a new series of in-depth interviews with the absolute heroes of the industry kick off on page 112 – and with the legendary Neal Adams, no less! – but we've vastly improved *Sidekick* too. Our striking card wallet contains three (count 'em!) mags: *Comic Heroes* itself, a new title called *Comic Heroes Presents*, and *Sidekick*, now vastly bigger and better, to the point that we've renamed it 'Giant-Size'. Seriously: never has *Comic Heroes* been more fun, or better value.

Plus! Wolverine, the most striking, sharpest-edged comic book hero introduced during most of our lifetimes. His rise changed the face of comics, and we look at quite how that happened in these pages too...

Matt Bielby,
Editor

YOUR FREE GIFTS!

1. GIANT-SIZE SIDEKICK!
Hey, Marvel and DC keep starting everything again from issue #1, so why shouldn't we? Especially as *Sidekick* is way better than it used to be; more pages (like, loads more!); physically bigger; a way better cover. And this allows us to run some longer strips too, like a brilliant 12-page chunk of Glyn Dillon's crazy-great *The Nao Of Brown*, and an *entire* issue of *The Bulletproof Coffin: Disinterred*. (And if you've never read this psychedelic, kitchen-sink, hard-boiled cop/superhero title before then, well, you're in for an eye-opening treat!)

2. COMIC HEROES PRESENTS: JUDGE DREDD
You wanted free comics, you've got free comics! This issue, please allow us to introduce a new title, *Comic Heroes Presents*, that concentrates on a particular character, creative team or publisher. To kick off, and to celebrate the launch of the new *Dredd* movie, it's all about the judge. We've two classic stories here – one of them 24 pages long! – by such top-of-the-range creators as John Wagner and Kev Walker; in all, this issue of *Comic Heroes* comes with an amazing 80 pages of strip...!

THE DEEP SIX

Meet the team; they look so nice, but each has a favourite violent moment...

MICHAEL MOLCHER
Garth Ennis' run on *Judge Dredd* can be hit and miss, but a classic is in Prog 736 when, fighting a heavily-armoured mutant, Dredd drives his Lawmaster into the guy's chest. Into. His. Chest. Made me grin like a loon!

JOEL MEADOWS
The amazing 'Gaze into the fist of Dredd!' Brian Bolland image from an early Dark Judges story, in which Joe puts his arm straight through Judge Fear's helmet. It's classic Dredd, a true punch-the-air moment.

JAMES LOVEGROVE
Doctor Manhattan reducing Rorschach to a casual gesture. It sums up *Watchmen* perfectly. And the smear, of course, at the same shape as that famous smiley-badge blot of blood...

PAUL GRAVETT
That understated moment in *Watchmen* when Rorschach snaps a man's pinky, and then his index finger before leaving. Moore & Gibbons made superhero violence painfully real as never before.

ROB POWER
Mitchonne is pretty terrifying anyway, but when *The Walking Dead*'s resident katana-wielding nutjob takes her bloody revenge on The Governor, it's pretty hardcore. Pliers, hammers, drills – nothing is off limits.

MATT BIELBY
When Bullseye skewered Elektra – and on her own spiky stick, no less. As ever, it was sharp enough to go right through her torso, but ran out of punch when it got to the back of her dress: a typical Miller stylistic flourish.

HEAT VISION

THE HOTTEST NEWS FOR ALL THINGS COMICS!

Same Same But Different

In the wake of DC's New 52 initiative, Marvel revamps its entire line this autumn with Marvel NOW! Except it's not a reboot. Or the entire line. Oh look, let's just let Marvel EIC Axel Alonso explain...
By Stephen Jewell. Additional reporting: **Richard Edwards**

If there's one constant in the world of comics, it's that nothing stays the same for long. Last September we saw the debut of the New 52; this autumn sees a similarly extensive shake-up at the House of Ideas.

Not that Marvel NOW!, as the new initiative is called, tears up the handbook in quite so sensational a fashion as DC's continuity massacre; instead expect a more gradual, less radical transition to the new status quo. As Marvel editor-in-chief Axel Alonso – until recently X-book editor, before taking over day-to-day responsibility for all comics from Joe Quesada in early 2010 – tells *Comic Heroes*, Marvel NOW! is not so much a reboot, more a new beginning...

"We don't travel back in time, into the future or to an alternate universe," he says. "All our stories will continue to take place in the Marvel U that readers are so invested in – financially and emotionally – and it features the characters you know and love."

Just as Geoff Johns' multiverse-spanning crossover *Flashpoint* paved the way for the New 52 last summer, this year's blockbuster-event-to-end-all-blockbuster-events leads directly into Marvel NOW!

"*Avengers Vs X-Men* is both an epilogue to the interconnected stories we've been telling since *House Of M* in 2005," Alonso continues, "and the perfect launching pad for something that we – and that I, personally – have wanted to do for a while. And that's a line-wide creator shift that harks back to 11 years ago, when we put a lot of stock in a simple formula: great artist plus great writer, great character plus great story, equals success.

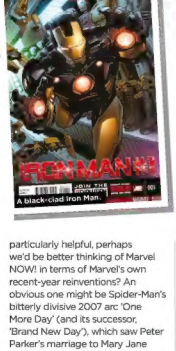
"We say to the creators, come up with great stories: treat it like a film, treat it like a great TV show, whatever your metaphor. Treat it like something you own. What do you want to do? Lose the bath water, but keep the baby."

PHOENIX RISING

But before then, Alonso is promising even more enthralling and devastating twists and turns in *Avengers Vs X-Men*, which has already seen five of the leading X-folk assume the power of the Phoenix Force, and thus ascended to near god-like status at the beginning of the saga's second act.

"There will be new alliances, shocking betrayals, self-sacrifice, disgrace and redemption," Alonso teases. "One major character will have a lot to atone for when this is all over, and another will look at the world through new eyes. Both teams will take a good look at themselves and consider who they are and what they stand for."

So if comparisons with the New 52, though tempting, aren't



particularly helpful, perhaps we'd be better thinking of Marvel NOW! in terms of Marvel's own recent-year reinventions? An obvious one might be Spider-Man's bitterly divisive 2007 arc 'One More Day' (and its successor, 'Brand New Day'), which saw Peter Parker's marriage to Mary Jane Watson erased from Marvel history. But no: these comparisons, too, would be wrong...

"That storyline was controversial because it utilised a supernatural element – a Faustian pact made with Mephisto – to change Spider-Man's reality," explains Alonso. "All the stories in Marvel NOW! take place in the post-*AvX* Marvel Universe. Nothing is wiped clean."

With inaugural Marvel NOW!-title *Uncanny Avengers* debuting in October, about the same time as Marvel's leading 'architects' Brian Michael Bendis, Matt Fraction and Ed Brubaker wrap up their long-running stints on *The Avengers*, *Iron Man* and *Captain America* respectively, this new reinvention is designed to allow for a 'more natural' progression than the New 52's clean break.

"We're taking a patient approach to the rollout," says Alonso. "There will be some overlap as writers finish up their stories, but that's only so we can do this right.

"We have faith in each and every one of these launches. So from October through to February, readers – old, lapsed or new – will have at least one strong reason to go into a comic store each month, since we will have on sale at least one new first issue that acts as an entry-point to the Marvel Universe."

THAT '70S SHOW...

With Brian Michael Bendis and Stuart Immonen taking over leadership duties on the mutant books with November's debut of their *All-New X-Men*, and Jonathan Hickman and Jerome Opena

The new-look line-up: spot the differences!

"This is not a story arc or limited series; they're here for the long haul"

assuming the reins on *Avengers* from December, the very simple desire of the House of Ideas' leading creators to do new things with familiar characters is, we're told, very much the driving force behind Marvel NOW!

"This is the perfect point in the ongoing story of the Marvel Universe for us to do this initiative," says Alonso. "Many of our writers – like Bendis, Brubaker and Fraction – have enjoyed long and prosperous runs on core titles, and are now ready for new creative challenges.

"But it's about more than just the writer and the artist, it's about what they plan to do with each title. I was a fan who grew up reading comics in the late '70s, when books very much had their own identities – *Shang-Chi* was a kung fu book, *Fantastic Four* was a science fiction book, *Luke Cage* was a blaxploitation book. It's going back to that."

Centring on the five original X-Men – including a pre-Phoenix Jean Grey journeying forward to the contemporary Marvel Universe from the we're-not-quite-sure-how-distant past – the bi-weekly *All-New X-Men* has already been greeted with some suspicion, and much anticipation.

As Brian Michael Bendis told US magazine *Entertainment Weekly*, the story's time travel elements will resemble the comedy-drama movie *Pleasantville* more than, say, *Back To The Future*, with the space/time-continuum aspects downplayed in favour of a more character-based drama.

"Here's the big question that the original X-Men will be faced with: 'We're going to grow up, and *this* is what we're going to get? That's not acceptable,'" teases Bendis.

But though this may sound like a relatively cosy storyline, Alonso warns not to expect any nostalgia.

"Brian's story brings the Lee and Kirby X-Men into the present to see what the world has become," he says, "and, indeed, which of them has made it this far.

"These are characters that fought to make Charles Xavier's dream a reality, entering into a world that's fallen short of that ideal in more ways than one. That's heady stuff. And they're here to stay. This is »

SO, WHO'VE WE GOT?

The teaser picture does just that: teases...

The exact roll-calls for the various teams that will take centre stage during Marvel NOW! remains a closely guarded mystery, but there's some interesting stuff going on for sure. Amongst assorted odd elements suggested by the promotional imagery (see left): Thor now carries swords, Hulk wears space-armour, Nova and '60s-style Marvel Girl are prominent, Iron Man's armour has gone all black, Cable wears an eye-patch, Cyclops now has an X-shaped visor – goodness know what the rays from that thing will look like – and the FF's Sue now seems to be hanging out without the rest of her gang. Plus, the black Nick Fury is actually his son (but looks just like Ultimate Nick, oddly), and Rocket Racoon. (Not sure what to say about that. Just: Rocket Racoon.)

"None of our aesthetic takes its cues directly from the movies," Alonso says. "Marvel's publishing arm has to be forward-thinking; we stand on our own two feet, and we're all about moving into the future. Am I inclined to want an Avengers team that resembles the movie's? Yeah, kinda I am. But The Avengers that Jon Hickman is doing is one that's forced to reassess what it is, and what it stands for, in the aftermath of *AvX*. We do our own thing."

MARVEL NOW! CHECKLIST

Here's what we think we'll be getting, at time of going to press...

The following titles are pretty much confirmed, to varying degrees of certainty...

>> All-New X-Men
Brian Michael Bendis & Stuart Immonen
>> Avengers
Jonathan Hickman & Jerome Opena
>> Captain America
Rick Remender & John Romita Jr.
>> Deadpool
Brian Posehn, Gerry Duggan & Tony Moore
>> Fantastic Four
Matt Fraction & Mark Bagley
>> FF
Matt Fraction & Mike Allred
>> Hulk
Mark Waid & Leinil Francis Yu
>> Iron Man
Kieron Gillen & Greg Land
>> New Avengers
Jonathan Hickman & Steve Epting
>> Thor
Jason Aaron & Esad Ribic
>> Uncanny Avengers
Rick Remender & John Cassaday

Since Marvel NOW! will eventually comprise more than 20 titles, it seems we now know maybe half of them; speculation on others is rife (will the mystery Simon Spurrier/Tan Eng Huat project be *X-Men Legacy*, for instance? Who knows?).

After the explosive *AvX*, what now for the Marvel U?

not a story arc or limited series; they're here for the long haul, and that's going to make for years of fascinating stories."

Boasting an 18-strong roster of heroes, Alonso hints that Jonathan Hickman's bi-weekly *Avengers* will be even more labyrinthine than Bendis' decade-long tenure on the title, and its various off-shoots. "We wanted to unleash an *Avengers* the same brain that made *Fantastic Four* a must-read," he says, "and a title that flew up the sales charts, to make it one of our biggest franchises. At our Creator Summit, Jonathan broke down his ideas for the future, including a blow-by-blow account of his first issue – and it's going to blow readers away!"

Combining seasoned X-Men like Rogue and Havok with Avengers lynchpins such as Captain America and Thor, *Uncanny X-Force*/*Secret Avengers* scribe Rick Remender and *Astonishing X-Men* artist John Cassaday's *Uncanny Avengers* will act as a bridge book between the two superteams.

"It's the first book to deliver a snapshot of the Marvel Universe in the aftermath of *AvX*," says Alonso, "so it's a must-read for both *Avengers* and X-Men fans, the same audience that showed up for *Avengers Vs X-Men*. The Uncanny Avengers are put together to deal with a specific threat, but it soon becomes so much more than that: can a team that realises the dream of Charles Xavier maintain it? That's the question at the heart of it."

TEAM TITANS

According to Alonso, this represents a big moment in the Marvel Universe.

"Many years ago, we were wondering why a team that called itself 'Earth's Mightiest Heroes' didn't include Spider-Man and Wolverine," he says, "and so the Avengers became our flagship franchise. A team that's equally composed of Avengers and X-Men is an equally seismic event that narrows the gaps between mutants and super-humans, but the ripple effects remain to the seen.

"*Uncanny Avengers*, in particular, is very much an indicator of what the tone and tenor of the Marvel Universe will be. As a former X-Men group editor, I know how segregated the X-Men universe was from the rest of the Marvel U, and how the X-Men's problems invariably meant fending off the latest threat to their existence. We're now moving into a world in which, post-*AvX*, maybe the questions those stories raised aren't as relevant as they were – or maybe the X-Men can never escape that. We're about to find out."

GUEST STARS?

While Ant-Man and – of all things – The Guardians of the Galaxy are poised to follow existing Avengers such as Iron Man and Captain America to the big screen in 2014, Alonso is coy over whether these characters will play more prominent roles in the Marvel Universe from here on in.

"There's a reason that Rocket Raccoon is included in the Marvel NOW! promo image," he laughs. "It's actually never been easier to communicate with the public. Only a few years ago, if you showed the man on the street a picture of the Avengers – namely Cap, Thor and Iron Man – they probably would have had little idea who they were. They might have known that they're superheroes, and might even have been able to name one or two, but they probably wouldn't have known their origins, powers or personalities – let alone that they composed the world's greatest super-team. Today, everyone knows the Avengers."

And this stuff's going to stick?

"This is an opportunity to build things to last – we're not launching these books to have half of them go away, or to turn around and have the writer replaced after the third or fourth issue. Might one or two of them not stick? It's always a possibility, but don't look at us to pull the plug on anyone after a few issues." **[HI]**

Marvel NOW! kicks off in October; read more next issue.

MORE WEIRD STUFF ABOUT MARVEL NOW!

>> Covers will be cinematic: which would seem to mean 'more flexible', allowing logos to go at the bottom, or the side, or wherever really – as on a movie poster.
>> Plenty of books won't change much, if at all: think *Daredevil*, *X-Factor* and others.
>> There'll be even more Avengers books than we're used to: like *Avengers* will be fortnightly, *Uncanny Avengers* and *New Avengers* are also about, so are *Secret Avengers*, *Avengers Assemble* and even *Avengers Academy* (probably). Blimey! Rumours suggest Shang-Chi to be prominent too...
>> The long-standing *Uncanny X-Men* is cancelled: or, at least, replaced, Bendis-style, with *All-New X-Men*.
>> Cosmic players haven't been bigger since the '70s: Thanos, Guardians of the Galaxy, Rocket Raccoon, Nova and others seem to be much more vocal than of late.

Toys Are Us

Back from crippling physical setbacks, Image co-founder Whilce Portacio returns to comics with an intriguing new science fiction project, *Non-Humans*: what if your toys came to life?

By Michael Molcher

Twenty years ago, in 1992, eight high-profile comic book artists, Whilce Portacio among them, founded Image Comics, a radical break from the DC/Marvel near-duopoly which suddenly allowed more creators to publish their material without giving up copyright. Two decades on, and the company – much changed – is still celebrating rare success.

Although Portacio had to leave the project shortly after it began, due to his sister's severe illness, the one-time *Incredible Hulk* artist's name has been linked with Image ever since. Now, as the company celebrates its 20th birthday, he has returned as co-creator with Glen Brunswick (*Jersey Gods*) on a new project, *Non-Humans*.

Described as '*Toy Story* meets *Blade Runner*', the series sees a mystery space virus gifting people with the strange ability to bring inanimate objects – such as teddy bears, action figures and other toys – to life. Portacio had earlier worked on a cover for *Jersey Gods*, and he says Brunswick's initial pitch completely grabbed him.

"Even before I got into comics I was a heavy sci-fi novel reader," he says, "and the basis of that is world building, complete with societal consequences."

In a world that humans must share with their creations, *Non-Humans* examines deep questions about the nature of sentient life, as well as what it means to have a soul. But while appealing to that childhood question of 'what if my toys were alive?', Portacio is keen to point out that this won't be *Toy Story* cute.

"If toys come to life, and are attached to our kids," he reasons, "we won't immediately destroy them. Instead we're more likely to try to either hide them or ignore them; and if we do, they'll grow into a big underground society, a true second class. If there are now hundreds of thousands of them, they try to survive, they try to make their lives mean something. Whether we want them to or not, they live.

"So now you have a cute teddy bear, who everybody seems to trust, but has limited options – so he might become a drug dealer. Similarly, if you have a human boy's dream girl – perhaps a Victoria's Secret mannequin – come to life; she'll want to be loved – and so attract all kinds, bad or good. If you have toys that look human, they try to pretend that they are."

> **"A teddy bear with limited options might become a drug dealer"**

IMAGE SEARCH

The modern incarnation of Image is built on creator-owned work, and Portacio says he's proud the ethos remains so strong.

"We're still the company that, because of our unique structure, can constantly think out of the box," he says, "and therefore push the market into new territories. Image doesn't need to constantly make more money... I feel that too much of the industry relies on what was successful before as the deciding factor upon what new books to do. Image can look at the virtues of a new concept."

For all his success, however, Portacio's own career has not been plain-sailing. Several years ago he ended up in a week-long diabetic coma, and afterwards he had to learn to draw again.

"I just did what any successful person does," he says, "which is, whatever he or she *needs* to do. It took me 10 years to relearn properly to paint, to draw, anatomy, light logic... everything I used to know instinctively. I can now do 10 pages a week if I really have to; I can do a full detailed digital painting in days; I can teach you exactly what I know. Because of my conscious effort to relearn everything, and do it in a conscious way, I can now teach artists."

Non-Humans launches in October.

It's the Ultimate Marvel team-up!

We've seen that sinister smile before...

Lot 13: Vertigo's hot new horror series.

A blast from the past for *Avengers* movie fans.

Spidey and Deadpool: in trouble for fighting?

New Comics

James Hunt slings his web and catches the issues coming soon

Unsure which big releases to buy? Wish you knew in advance what titles will be on everyone's lips? Don't worry, help is at hand courtesy of *Comic Heroes'* regular look at the must-read releases that will be hitting comic shop shelves over the next two months...

MARVEL

The end of *Avengers Vs X-Men* and the start of the line-wide reshuffle Marvel NOW! means big things for the Marvel Universe in September and October. First, discover the fate of the Phoenix Five in *Avengers Vs X-Men* #11 & #12 by Jason Aaron, Brian Bendis, Olivier Coipel and Adam Kubert, then witness the fallout in Marvel NOW!'s flagship *Uncanny Avengers* #1, a new ongoing series by fan-favourite Rick Remender and drawn by none other than John Cassaday.

Elsewhere, Brian Bendis begins his final *Avengers* storylines in October's *Avengers* #31 & *New Avengers* #31, capping off a decade of stewardship for Marvel's premiere team, while Kieron Gillen makes his own exit (pun intended) in September's *Uncanny X-Men* #20. In October, *X-Men Legacy* #275 marks the series' end as Magneto makes Rogue an offer she might not be able to refuse, while Matt Fraction leaves Thor as 'Everything Burns' concludes in *The Mighty Thor* #22. Of course, if you want a 'real' ending, then *Daredevil: End Of Days* #1 (of 8) sees Brian Bendis, David Mack, Klaus Janson and Bill Sienkiewicz unite for a special Last Ever Daredevil Story.

Feathers and guns in *Nagovy*

Spider-Man's 50th anniversary celebrations continue as *Amazing Spider-Man* #693 & #694 feature Spidey's new sidekick, Alpha, while *Avenging Spider-Man* #12 sends both Spidey and Deadpool back to high school, courtesy of *Robot Chicken* writer Kevin Shinik. And who can forget the conclusion of the once-in-a-lifetime meeting of Miles Morales and Peter Parker, which appears in *Spider-Men* #5?

Finally, if you're looking for some classics from the past, fans of *The Avengers* movie might be interested in *Thanos Quest* #1 (which re-presents the classic Jim Starlin/Ron Lim storyline from 1990) while *Big Hero Six: Brave New Heroes* #1 reprints the Chris Claremont/David Nakayama miniseries in anticipation of Disney's just-announced *Big Hero Six* animated movie!

DC

The New 52 begins its second year in September, and to celebrate they're giving every ongoing series its own special 'issue zero' prequel. Ones to watch include *Talon* #0, the debut of a new hero spinning out of the 'Court Of Owls' *Batman* crossover; *Justice League* #0, which explains how Shazam comes back to the DCU; and *Resurrection Man* #0, the series' final issue. Don't forget *Batman* #0, either, which explains how Bruce Wayne became Batman and where, exactly, he gets those wonderful toys.

In October, don't miss *Justice League* #13, which begins the lead-in to the first New 52 event, 'Trinity War', or the comic that reintroduces fan-favourite Black Lightning to the DCU, *DC Universe Presents* #13. Elsewhere, Grant Morrison promises a major change to Superman's status quo in *Action Comics* #13, and Scott Snyder finally brings the Joker back to Gotham in *Batman* #13.

If it's new series you're interested in, there are two chances to hop

Dark Horse's female phantom returns in *Ghost*.

Toys come to life in *Non-Humans*.

It's Gillen's last act on *Uncanny X-Men*.

The New 52's *The Phantom Stranger*.

> **Scott Snyder finally brings the Joker back to Gotham in #13**

onboard several New 52 series with *Team 7* #0 & #1, *Sword Of Sorcery* #0 & #1 and *Phantom Stranger* #0 & #1 all out in September and October respectively. And if you're looking for something a bit different, then Steve Niles and Glenn Fabry's new Vertigo horror series starts with *Lot 13* #1.

Finally, don't forget that the controversial sales juggernaut of *Before Watchmen* will be rolling on throughout the autumn.

INDEPENDENTS

In September, Dark Horse brings back one of its most popular characters in *Ghost* #0 which leads into a new ongoing *Ghost* series. The following month, Eisner-winning writer Eric Powell teams up with Kyle Hotz for *Billy The Kid's Old Timey Oddities and The Orm of Loch Ness* #1.

IDW brings a fresh perspective on the new Trek universe in *Star Trek* #13 (titled 'The Redshirt's Tale') and then celebrates the 25th anniversary of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* in *Star Trek TNG: Hive* #1. Former *2000 AD* editor and top Marvel writer Andy Diggle

kicks off the new ongoing series in *Doctor Who* #1.

September and October are big months for Image. Grant Morrison and Darick Robertson debut their long-awaited creator-owned series in *Happy!* #1, Nick Spencer and Riley Rossmo launch *Bedlam* #1, and Glen Brunswick and Whilce Portacio kick off their *Toy Story*-meets-*Blade Runner* sci-fi epic, *Non-Humans* #1.

And finally, if you've somehow missed the cultural phenomenon that is *The Walking Dead*, October's *The Walking Dead* #103 is a series jumping-on point spinning out of the end of climactic storyline 'Something To Fear'. Fans of the TV show will also be interested in *The Walking Dead: Michonne*, a special one-shot reprinting the character's first appearance and a rare origin story first featured in *Playboy*. If that doesn't get you excited, maybe you're already a zombie... **[41]**

INDIE SPOTLIGHT

Building Stories

Written and drawn by Chris Ware (Jimmy Corrigan) over the past seven years, the *Building Stories* hardcover collects an anthology of tales all set in a single three-flat Chicago house. At once stylish, affecting, ambitious and relatable, *Building Stories* is sure to take its place alongside Ware's greatest work.

Available 4 October from Jonathan Cape, 246 pages, £30

HELLO.
Giant alien 'roaches show their softer side.
I CAN'T BELIEVE I LOST MY TEMPER AND ATTACKED THE ALIEN AMBASSADOR.
I'M GOING TO BE KICKED OFF THE SHIP.
WHICH IN BIGGER BOY TERMS COULD MEAN BANISHMENT TO LIFE IN SPACE IGNORED BY MAN.
I'LL BE ALL ALONE.
SO, WHAT'S THE PLAN? I MEAN, DO YOU EVEN KNOW WHAT'S HAPPENING?
I DON'T KNOW.
I MEAN, WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO? I'M NOT EVEN SURE I'M HUMAN ANYMORE.
I'VE BEEN DEAD, I'VE BEEN A DEMON, I'VE BEEN SOULLESS AND NOW I'M SOMETHING ELSE.
I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHO I AM ANYMORE.
YOUR PLAN? SPEAKING OF WHICH...
I DON'T THINK I'VE EVER SEEN YOU LOOK SO LOST.
WE MUST TALK, MASTER.
THOUGHT I MADE IT CLEAR, I WASN'T IN THE MOOD.
WE HAVE NOTICED YOUR OBSESSION WITH DRAGONS, SIRE, AND YOUR BROODING IS ENTERING AN UNHEALTHY PHASE.
Spike does plenty of soul searching...

Introspection With The Vampire

Victor Gischler talks Spike, space bugs and rolled up newspapers

The world's favourite punk rock vampire returns in August as Dark Horse takes over the adventures of *Buffy The Vampire Slayer: Spike* from IDW with a new miniseries.

Victor Gischler and artist Paul Lee follow Spike on a trip to the Moon and back with alien cockroaches, demons and witches.

"We're not looking to turn this into 'Spike in Space!'" says Victor. "There's a modest amount of space travel, but we're focused mostly on very down-to-earth issues. Spike is looking very much inward. He's just come off a bummer of a scene with Buffy and now has to take a really good long look at himself."

The bleached blond vampire has come a long way from the character who was introduced as a villain of the week in the TV show. He fell in love with a Slayer, sacrificed himself and came back from beyond this mortal coil.

"Spike is a rare vampire with a soul. Figuring out exactly what his view of the world is – and his place in it – is a big part of this," says Gischler. "Spike was originally presented to us as a villain. Joss Whedon brilliantly evolved the character into something much more, and I see this mini as a continuation of that. Imagine that you're comfortable with who you are, and then the universe suddenly says, 'That's not you' and you have to figure it out all over again.

"This is sort of where Spike's head is at the moment. Was life easier as a villain? Does having a soul help or hurt? The answers are really the key to Spike's fate."

> **"Spike has to take a really good long look at himself"**

DEMON HUNTER

All this introspection doesn't mean Spike will be sitting around gazing at his navel. "He has plenty of demons to fight, so there'll be a good dose of action," says Gischler. "And we're introducing a new demon that Spike isn't quite sure about at first. But at the risk of sounding corny, he's really mostly up against himself. We all know what it's like to have our lives turned upside down and then have to answer the hard question 'What now?' That's what he's up against."

The last *Spike* series and Season Eight of *Buffy* introduced the space bugs that return here, along with a spaceship of undisclosed provenance. "Their origin is a story for another time, and I have the feeling it's a doozy," says Gischler, cryptically. "But the bug aliens provide excellent comic relief. They're very loyal and extremely concerned with Spike's welfare."

Although he's working on a high profile property, Gischler says he never feels constrained. "What I'm writing is very much in line with the *Buffy*verse. And anyway, the editors hit me on the nose with a rolled up newspaper if I go in the wrong direction." **[HT]**

***Buffy The Vampire Slayer: Spike** is on sale now.*

THE VIEW FROM A BOARD

Mike Perkins just loves the internet: it enables him to draw *anywhere...*

The freelance life is simply fantastic at times. I'm writing this column, not at home in America, but on a hilltop in a sleepy Bavarian village called Rieden – just outside Fussen, if that means anything to you – overlooking the Tyrol mountain range, a green/blue lake and the Neuschwanstein Castle (you know, the one Walt Disney based Cinderella's gaff on!). I'm able to do this – and incredibly easily, I might add – due only to the glory of the internet.

Just a few years ago (about 1995-98), I was living in Poland, and – as now – working for British and American publishers; but, let me tell you, it was a very different story.

Without a computer, dependent on the vagaries of the postal service and in possession of a heat-sensitive fax machine, any sort of contact at all was touch-and-go. Woe betide anyone who faxed me while I was out, as the only telephone line was situated by a window and – should the fax spool out on to the sill – the script (or contract, or whatever it was) would have faded to invisibility in the sunlight by the time I got home.

I remember dealing with one American editor who just couldn't get it into his head that I could actually work in *Poland* – obviously, in his mind, the other side of the world was populated entirely by massive shot-putters queuing up for bread while waving Solidarnosc flags – and still get anything to him on time. I did, of course – but it was certainly a little more difficult than it is now.

WORKING HOLIDAY

These days you're only as far away from your editorial office as the slowest FTP account. The past couple of years I've been lucky enough to escape the humidity of a Florida summer for a couple of months, and set up studio at my wife's parent's home in Poland. This also enables me to have a little break for a week or so in some other area of Europe; I find actually getting away from my board for a while is amazing therapy, especially as I know I'll soon start to experience that delectable itching in my fingers again – a longing to get back to drawing comics.

After I've wrapped up this small vacation I'm still not heading home. Instead, I'm off on a small signing tour around Germany – arranged and funded by publishers Panini – with a detour to a comics festival in Contern, Luxembourg, too; I'm scheduled to sign in four cities in as many days! It's always nice to hobnob with other creators, but I'm truly excited about the prospect of meeting so many European fans.

I'll be travelling with a German driver, on the German autobahn, and am fully expecting to break the sound barrier somewhere along the way. You may well hear me screaming all the way over in Britain!

Of course, another minor wonder of this internet age is that I can take on commissioned illustration pieces (like the ones on this page) a few weeks before each signing, and then hand them over, personally, to their new home.

This approach is much more satisfying for me, as I can take more time over each piece, and it saves me from the cringe factor of seeing my quick-head, on-the-spot sketches – flaws and all – posted online. Brrr.

Classic-style Thor, lightning all about.
Storm, owner of the best boots ever.
Cap and U.J, well armed for once.
Red Sonja: chainmail worn as beachwear!

66 These days you're only as far away from your editorial office as the slowest FTP account 99

So, hurrah for the internet. It doesn't just make the freelance life easier – so much easier – than it used to be; it allows it to sometimes be spectacular too.

If Mike Perkins loves the internet so much, why is he trying to break it in half each month with his shock weddings in ***Astonishing X-Men****!*

He's In Fashion

Alan Moore's 'unfilmable' screenplay, *Fashion Beast*, finally makes it out of the realm of legend, thanks to Antony Johnston and a new comic book adaptation from Avatar... **By Stephen Jewell**

Alan Moore might not have a good thing to say about Zack Snyder's big budget *Watchmen* adaptation (or, indeed any of the other Hollywood blockbusters that have been based on his iconic comic books) but it wasn't always quite this way. In the mid-'80s – at the height of his initial burst of popularity – the Northampton mage penned an original screenplay of his own.

Inspired by an idea from legendary Sex Pistols manager Malcolm McLaren, *Fashion Beast* told the tale of a 20th century con and innovator in a bold, inventive (erm) fashion. Described as "a marriage between the strange, isolated life of Christian Dior and the fable of the *Beauty And The Beast*," it was out-there, perhaps overly ambitious, and eventually abandoned – for years, Moore fans have wondered exactly what it might be like.

Well, wonder no more. While *Fashion Beast* won't be coming to a cinema near you, anytime soon it will be heading to your local comic shop next month, thanks to Avatar Press, longtime Moore collaborator Antony Johnston (*The Courtyard*, *The Hypothetical Lizard*) and artist Facundo Percio (*Anna Mercury*), together they've turned it into a 10-part comic book series. We spoke to Johnston about how it was done...

Fishnets, stripes and bold prints: surely a fashion fail?

COMIC HEROES: You've already adapted several Alan Moore short stories for comics. Was *Fashion Beast* any different?

ANTONY JOHNSTON: No matter what I'm adapting, the process always begins by simply reading the source text – in this case, the screenplay – over and over again. To write a good adaptation, you have to be almost as familiar with it as the original author was. I then made a list of questions and phoned Alan to go over them with him. Phone calls with Alan are rare, brief affairs, and this one was especially epic – but between us we hammered out most of the potential problems.

CH: Was the screenplay as dense as Alan's infamously hefty comic scripts?

AJ: There's a reason *Fashion Beast* has always been called unfilmable. Of course, that's not literally true – but it's hard to think of a working director who'd actually want to film it as-is, because almost every decision (from framing to

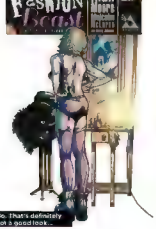
> **"A morality play of sorts, with very little in the way of morality"**

The anti-fashion army takes to the streets

compos bon, lighting to even acting direction) has already been made by Alan in the script, sometimes in mind-boggling detail.

CH: *Fashion Beast* is set in a dystopian future, but was originally written nearly 30 years ago; surely it's bound to have dated in the meantime.

AJ: It's actually surprisingly timeless. The only thing that really marks it out as a product of the '80s is the backdrop of nuclear war. But frankly, with the way the world's going these days, suddenly that doesn't seem so anachronistic any more.



No. That's definitely not a good look...

CH: Of course, *Fashion Beast* blends slices of Christian Dior's life story with the famous fable of *Beauty And The Beast*...

AJ: There are definitely some influences from Dior's life here, with elements like Celestine's self-imposed isolation, tireless work ethic and irrepressible ego. But there's much more of *Beauty And The Beast* albeit with the kind of twists and distortion you'd expect from the minds of both Alan and Malcolm. It's a morality play of sorts, but one with very little in the way of morality.

CH: What can you tell us about the story?

AJ: It centres on Doll Seguin, a gender-bending nobody with aspirations to fame, who gets plucked from obscurity by the world's foremost fashion designer, Celestine, a reclusive and obsessive hermit whose ugliness is as legendary as his capriciousness.

But the supposed dream opportunity becomes a nightmare, as Doll sees the true industry behind the billboards and catwalks, and finds unlikely allies in her desire to do something meaningful with her life. She also makes various friends and enemies, which gets to the heart of what the story is really about.

Fashion Beast is only partly about the fashion industry. It's also about life, death, the human need for social status, the cynics who will happily prey on that need, other cynics who are equally happy to sell themselves for that need... and the ultimate question of whether any of this matters. Does fashion really have a role to play, in the face of global breakdown? **[AT]**

Fashion Beast hits the finest boutiques in September

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Everybody Dies!

Uncanny X-Men's 'Days of Future Past' stunned fandom – and now it's about to rock the big screen...

When you've done the Phoenix story, sort of, and the origins of Wolverine, when you've told a bunch of Magneto tales and introduced the Hellfire Club; then, finally, the pieces are in place. It's time to tackle the most on-the-nose X-Men story of them all.

Thankfully, Bryan Singer thinks the same way, announcing Matthew Vaughn's *X-Men: First Class* sequel will be called *Days Of Future Past* – and will be a much-modified riff on one of the greatest tales (perhaps *the* greatest tale) in X-Men history.

Punningly named for a Moody Blues album, cropping up three years before the similarly-plotted first *Terminator* film, it's a time travel tale that begins in a grim near future of (gulp!) 2013, where robots (in this case, the mutant-hating Sentinels) have enforced martial law in the US, and all the mutants and other superheroes have been killed off or dragged to camps. In Marvel's most blatant evocation of the Holocaust ever.

Naturally, it's up to a handful of beaten X-Men survivors – including Magneto, the first time we'd ever seen him in a heroic role – to fight back. (Or, as 2013 'Kate Pryde says, "Then... it's up to the X-Men." And Logan replies, "As always, when there's a world to save.")

This is Chris Claremont and John Byrne firing on all cylinders, and a key text in the mutants' rise to genuine marquee status. Naturally, a movie version will play around with everything, but here are some of the treats in store if – as they should be – the best bits are retained unsullied.

■ Our heroine is Kitty Pryde, then an utterly green just-joined early teen (she'd only been introduced three issues back!), but now suddenly presented to us as a grown woman and Sarah Connor-style partisan heroine, joining up with a grizzled Wolverine in a plan to change the past, and so fix their present. This involves the desperate decision to send the mind of future-Kitty back in time to take control of her earlier self.

■ 'Days...' heaved with shocking moments and examples of punch-the-air heroism too. Its mid-story climax has Mystique lead a new gang of 'Evil Mutants' in a public attempt to assassinate anti-mutant senator Robert Kelly, only for woman-child Kitty and the modern day X-Men to make a last minute save.

"Except for that winged bozo, you sure ain't no X-Men I've ever met," sneers Blob. "That's right, fatso. We're better," zings Wolverine, and it's on.

■ X-Men – and Marvel as a whole – has returned to the 'Days...' universe time and time again since; Rachel Summers was first introduced here, a new, beaten-looking X-Man who's since become a major player in Marvel's 'present day', so was the idea that Magneto could ever be considered sympathetic, a major element in his characterisation ever since.

■ Hero tombstones had been seen before, of course, but nothing like the Sentinel-built graveyard future-Kate walks past: Johnny Storm, Ben Grimm, Charles Xavier, Scott Summers, Kurt Wagner... Brrr, we went. This was *Schindler's List* in four-colour form.

***X-Men: Days Of Future Past** is due in July 2014 – a whole year after the Sentinels kill everyone!*

FROM THE MAKERS OF SFX MAGAZINE
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Wolverine wallet image © Marvel Comics

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"I still have more than enough time to conquer the world."

SHAPERS OF WORLDS

Brain Food & Horn Heads

Mike Allred

As one door swings shut (the not entirely tear-free ending of top Vertigo series *iZOMBIE*), another opens: this summer Mike Allred's always-brings-a-smile retro Pop Art sensibility is let loose on the Marvel Universe, starting with a certain red-garbed Man Without Fear...

By Michael Molcher

We're looking at one of the most exciting – in a pure-fun sense – projects of the year, when the artist says, "As I look at these pages, I think this could be the best single issue of anything I've ever done."

Bold words from Mike Allred – the creative force of [mischievous] nature behind some of the most anarchic comics of the past 20 years, including *Madman* and *X-Statix* – about his current labour of love: a very special issue of his childhood favourite, *Daredevil*. Allred, a long time staple of the summer end of the indie comic scene, is having something of a 'Marvel Moment' right now – he's also working on an as-yet unannounced new series for the Marvel NOW! launch – but first he and his colourist wife, Laura, are wrapping up their creator owned [with writer Chris Roberson] Vertigo series *iZOMBIE*, which will come to a close with issue #28.

"It's been a blur," he admits. "I can't believe it's been 28 issues. It feels like we've just started; it's been just one big marathon of a comic book-making party."

Comic Heroes: It was long-term friend and editor Shelly Bond who introduced you to Chris, and his idea for *iZOMBIE*, wasn't it? It promised a contemporary take on the time-worn zombie genre...

Mike Allred: I've always been a zombie movie fan, and I was very aware that it was a modern take – in fact, a very different take. It's really *not* a zombie book, and I like that subversive aspect of it. It was ultimately a character piece – one with a female lead, which I also found very attractive. Chris had made reference to a minor character who looked like Debbie Harry from Blondie, and I immediately thought, 'No no no no, she should be the *star*' – and he liked that idea. Shelly and I are massive music fans and talk obsessively about it all the time.

From this conversation we all just started swelling up with enthusiasm, and it was clear that this was something we were all excited about. It developed a life of its own after that.

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CH: The series, starring brain-eating 'zombie detective' Gwen Dylan, has been an indie hit – not least thanks to you bringing a touch of retro chic with your 'Pop Art meets comic book' style.

MA: The original concept was that she would eat a brain and take on the aspects of the person who it belonged to, and right the wrongs or tie up the loose ends of their life. It was originally going to be like a 'brain of the month' kind of series, which I was very happy with.

But for various reasons we got caught up in this whole other sub-plot, and then we started this epic storyline involving the end of the world. So it became clear that it was more of a large graphic novel as opposed to a continuing series, and that's what I mean when I say it got a life of its own. When Shelley called me and wanted my take on it, I thought it felt right that we should take the opportunity to wrap it up and, for me, it has the perfect self contained feel to it. I'm very proud of this series and I'm looking forward to it being published in a gigantic single volume.

CH: It's not all been plain sailing, though. Earlier this year Roberson criticised DC's attitude towards creators' rights, and the company severed all ties. The end of *iZOMBIE* was announced not long after. You've said you understand Chris but don't feel the same way...

MA: I guess I've been spoiled. I've been able to play with characters I've loved while growing up. I might have feelings about the way companies treat creators – and I'm always willing to fight the good fight – but I just don't ever want to shut doors on opportunities. For one thing, it prevents me from doing something about the things that I feel should be changed.

Alfred and *DD*; it seems a perfect fit...

MA: I could spend hours complaining about how some creators have been treated, and refuse to work on something like *Daredevil* because it's company-owned, but I have to be honest, I don't feel that way.

For me, I approach it from my affection for the character, and for all the creators who've worked on it. Years ago there was nearly a *Daredevil*/*Madman* crossover, so for me to finally get my turn is very exciting – it makes me feel like a little kid again. I may be naïve, or not politically astute, but that's why I do comic books, it just hits me with great joy, and the intense desire to be creative. That's something I can never turn away from. I'm more in love with the medium than I've ever been.

> **To get my turn on *DD* is very exciting – it makes me feel like a little kid again**

CH: There's still a final issue of *iZOMBIE* to come, of course, with what you call a 'unique, non-traditional zombie ending'. Brilliantly, it seems to be ending with all guns blazing – not least thanks to Laura's recent Eisner Award for best colourist...

MA: I think it's the best work Laura's ever done. I'm very, very happy with the results, and I'm looking forward to seeing what people think of it. I could get sad about *iZOMBIE*, but Chris and I have talked about coming back to it – maybe doing a 'Dead Presidents' project. There's a lot of potential there.

CH: This bittersweet end to a relative hit for Vertigo has, of course, been tempered by other projects – not least the excitement surrounding your forthcoming special *Daredevil* issue.

Above: Alfred is bringing his distinctive Pop Art style to Marvel's Daredevil

***iZOMBIE*, ends with issue #28, out around now, as is Alfred's *DD* issue; we have a preview of his forthcoming *It Girl & The Atomics* in this issue's *Giant-Size Sidekick*.**

Perfect Stranger

Dan DiDio

DC big cheese Dan DiDio's spectacular gambles of the past year – reinvent everything! Bring back *Watchmen*! – appear to be paying off. But what surprises does the New 52's 'Third Wave' hold?

By Stephen Jewell

Announced with much fanfare last summer, DC's unprecedented decision to cancel its entire existing line of comic books and relaunch the lot – with some omissions, many additions – as the 'New 52' was greeted with excitement, scepticism and disbelief in roughly equal measure. Each month, 52 ongoing series would be published; the Wildstorm imprint (and some of Vertigo) would be absorbed into the mainstream DCU, and everything would start again with brand new first issues.

It's been a strange old year since then, with plenty of breakout hits, some damp squibs, and numerous hard-to-get-your-head-around reinventions of classic characters. On balance, though, most naysayers are being forced to scram down on their words, as DC co-publisher Dan DiDio's gamble appears to be paying off – in sales, and in the general level of excitement surrounding the line.

Suddenly, DC was top of the pile again, commanding eight slots in the comic book sales Top Ten in its launch month, and with the Geoff Johns/Jim Lee *Justice League* becoming the best selling book of the year. Also making particularly strong waves were Scott Snyder and Greg Capullo's much liked *Batman*, Grant Morrison's smartly oddball *Action Comics*, and one-time Vertigo mainstays such as *Swamp Thing*.

Inevitably some titles haven't lasted the course, with the likes of *Mister Terrific*, *Hawk & Dove* and the DiDio-penned *OMAC* making way for a Second Wave in May this year, which notably saw China Miéville's *Dial H* and James Robinson's *Earth 2* joining the fold.

Now, after commemorating September's first anniversary with a series of standalone 'zero' issues, October will usher in a Third Wave, which includes Scott Snyder and James Tynion IV's *Batman* spin-off *Talon* and Justin Jordan's Wildstorm revival *Team Seven*, while DiDio will team up with Brent Anderson on *The Phantom Stranger*, which apparently lays the groundwork for next year's inaugural New 52 crossover, *Trinity War*. While the arrival of *Avengers Vs X Men* in April saw Marvel reassert itself forcefully, the fact remains that – for the first time in an age – 'the House of Ideas' appears to be playing catch-up.

> **"The goal is to slow it down and rediscover these worlds"**

Certainly, the upcoming Marvel Now! reboot pretty much begs for 'diluted New 52' comparisons at first glance, and – in the meantime – June's arrival of DC's rather controversial, big-name *Before Watchmen* line has seen the pendulum swing its away once again. So, how is Dan DiDio enjoying his time in the eye of the storm?

Comic Heroes: How refreshing has it been to ditch the baggage of the old continuity?

Dan DiDio: We made a conscious decision to do this, but everyone keeps saying, 'When are you going to snap back?' The reality is that – as long as I'm around – we're *never* going back. The most difficult thing we have to face right now is the inherent urge just to slowly return to what we used to do. We have to resist talking in shorthand, which is, of course, tempting, because you'd expect people who've been reading comics for the last 20 years to know everything that's been going on.

CH: What's been the biggest challenge with the New 52?

DD: There's a constant struggle with all the talent – and I'm as guilty of it as anybody – to make sure we take our time. You just want to rush forward to all the good parts, but by doing so, *you sacrifice so* much great storytelling along the way – and you end up doing a disservice to the fans. The goal is to slow it down and get back to everybody discovering these worlds again.

CH: To keep things moving, you introduced a New 52 'Second Wave' after eight months or so. How has that gone down?

DD: Again, really well. The level of acceptance there's been for the idea of 'Earth 2' is a big one for us, because that comes wrapped up with all the baggage of what might be considered 'Old DC'. But we found a way to reinvent it, and James Robinson, of all people, did a wonderful job with it. He'd written *JSA* for so long that these characters' previous incarnations must surely be ingrained, but the fact that he was able to spin it around just shows his ability as a storyteller.

WHATEVER ALL YOU ARE IS IN MY WAY
ROCKER BORN, CODENAME THE AMAZING MAN FORMER OPERATIVE FOR THE AGENCY KNOWN AS CHECKMATE
A SNAPPED UNDER SUSPICIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES TWO YEARS AND AFTER UNDERGOING EXTENSIVE EXTERMINATUS BY CROMUS
CROMUS

CH: China Miéville's *Dial H* was highly anticipated on this side of the pond, of course...

DD: That's been a lot of fun! We'd gone down another road earlier, developing a different property with China but it didn't end up coming together. So the fact that he stepped up and took on *Dial H* – which, for the most part, is something you'd think should have just been left on the side and forgotten – and found a way to reinvent it for today was spectacular.

CH: What are your plans for the New 52's first birthday?

DD: We're going to celebrate it in our own way, and then we'll take it from there. There are two things that I want to make sure we always do: that we always feel new and fresh, and that we've always got 52 books out there.

CH: Of course, this is comics, and no one would expect Marvel just to sit on the sidelines and let DC take all the headlines for long. One spectacular success they've had recently has been *The Avengers* movie, the third highest grossing film in cinema history. What are your thoughts there?

DD: It's funny, because I was asked very similar questions when *Batman Begins* and *The Dark Knight Returns* were coming out. To tell you the truth, I separate the films and comics in my mind, because I'm all about publishing and I've got to be protective of that. I consider comics to be the inspiration and the source of all this material. So it's great that these movies might draw attention to us, but nobody should ever forget that The Avengers, Batman and all the rest sprang from comics. That's what they were first, and that's where they became popular and where they developed as characters. It's what was created in the comics that has made the films successful – not the other way round.

Dan DiDio's *Phantom Stranger* debuts in September, along with three other new books: *Talon*, violent heroes grab-bag *Team Seven*, and *Sword Of Sorcery*, featuring two fantasy strips: an *Amethyst, Princess Of Gemworld* revival and a new take on DC's version of *Beowulf*.

Above: New 52 hits such as *Batman: Justice League* and *Action Comics* have helped put DC back on top.

Thriller Night

Steve Niles

Most inter-company crossovers are fine, and fun, though nobody really expects any status quo change – but what happens when it's the same guy behind both franchises?

By Stephen Jewell

Just as it's always been a happy home for low budget film making and fresh-out-of-college directors, so horror – cheap, nasty, gleefully inventive – has often been the perfect genre for creator-owned comic book work. Just check out the ongoing success of *The Walking Dead* for proof, or – as here – the career of Steve Niles. Ever since he adapted Richard Matheson's classic *I Am Legend* for the late Eclipse Comics in the early '90s, the seasoned comic scribe and novelist has largely concentrated on his own creations, almost eschewing superheroes for more blood-splattered properties.

His crucial breakthrough came in 1991, of course, when he sent a list of unsuccessful screenplay pitches to Ted Adams, president of the then fledgling IDW Publishing, who was drawn to a little vampire siege thriller. Eventually illustrated by Ben Templesmith, the resulting *30 Days Of Night* three-part miniseries proved to be a slow burn success, going stellar after producer Sam Raimi steered a largely accomplished movie version in 2007.

After several further miniseries sequels and spin offs, Niles launched an ongoing *30 Days Of Night* series in October 2011, which leads into this December's ambitious *30 Days Of Night/Criminal Macabre* crossover from Dark Horse and IDW. [*Criminal Macabre* being Niles' other horror series, starring the John Constantine like supernatural investigator Cal McDonald.]

Not that Steve Niles plays exclusively in his own pools, earlier this year, he teamed up with legendary *Swamp Thing* artist Bernie Wrightson on IDW's *Frankenstein Alive, Alive!*, while he and Jimmy Palmiotti's *Creator Owned Heroes* anthology series at Image has provided a much needed platform for new ideas since debuting in June. As Niles told *Comic Heroes*, *Creator Owned Heroes* does exactly what it says on the tin…

BORN NEW JERSEY, US
HIGH 30 DAYS OF NIGHT
NOW CREATOR-OWNED HEROES
MORE www.steveniles.com

Comic Heroes: We like *Creator-Owned Heroes*; and the fact that the name seems to sum up your entire attitude to comics…
Steve Niles: I've got lots of reasons for liking 'creator-owned', the biggest being that you actually get to control your own material. That's no small thing; it's not even a legal thing, where you get to sell the movie rights yourself. More than anything, you get the most honest and sincere work that a creator can do. Even when I do work for DC, I'm playing in their sandbox – so if they say that Batman can't do this or that, I have to listen to them. That's fine and fun, but to me the really exciting part of 'creator-owned' – and *Creator-Owned Heroes* – is that we can do things that the corporate companies can't, which seems to be anything other than superheroes.

It's beyond me why there isn't a booming sci-fi comics business, for instance, because if there's one thing that could be done really well in comics – better than in film, and even novels, because you get to combine images and words – it's sci-fi. And yet we have no real sci-fi comics.

CH: Very few, you're right. But you've explored post-apocalyptic scenarios in *'American Muscle'*, your first contribution to *Creator-Owned Heroes*…
SN: One of my pet peeves with all those kinds of movies – and comics – is that the characters always seem stunned by what's

"One series will end; the other will be permanently affected"

happening. I wanted the characters to be *aware* of the fact that the wasteland is dangerous. After *American Muscle* ends in *Creator-Owned Heroes* #4, I'm doing a two-part Western called '*Black Sparrow*', which I'm co-writing with the film director Jay Russell (*Ladder 49* and *The Water Horse*). It's a very quiet story about a family in the old West trying to come to grips with the fact that one of their loved ones is a murderer.

CH: Meanwhile, Bernie Wrightson is doing some amazing work on *Frankenstein Alive, Alive!*

SN: It's tough for me to even take *any* credit on that book, because Bernie is also helping with the writing – and his art is absolutely stunning. That's filed under 'dream come true' for me, as I was about 18 when Bernie's first Frankenstein book, *The Illustrated Frankenstein*, came out in 1983. It was a huge thing for me when I was young, along with the *Frankenstein* novel itself, and all the different movies. Now to have grown up, so to speak, and be working with Bernie on a sequel is just mind-blowing.

CH: Are you staying pretty faithful to Mary Shelley's original vision?

SN: We didn't want to do any cheap theatrics, so we're not going to have the monster riding a motorcycle or shooting a machine gun. I don't know why people do that when they bring Frankenstein back, suddenly he's a superhero. The important thing for Bernie and myself is that we really followed the spirit of the novel, which meant being inside the monster's head. The one thing that neither he, nor we, ever learn is who or what he is, and how he fits into the world. That's very much what we want to explore as we move him through time a little bit. We're not going to have any sudden character changes, it's still very much the creature from Mary Shelley's novel.

CH: And who needs Marvel or DC when you're holding your own crossover in December, as Cal McDonald from *Criminal Macabre* meets the bloodsuckers from *30 Days Of Night* in *'Final Night'*.

SN: It took a little doing to get IDW and [*Criminal Macabre* publishers] Dark Horse to see how great this could be. The thing about these kinds of big events is that nothing of consequence ever actually happens. If you do *Spider-Man/Superman*, it's not like DC or Marvel are going to want something to happen to one of their characters in that venue. But I'm making the promise with *Criminal Macabre/30 Days Of Night* that I'm going to end one of the series, and the other will be permanently affected by what happens.

CH: That sounds intriguing, and it presumably frees you up a little for next year, when you're going to be doing a project called *Chin Music* at image, with artist Tony (*Starman, Ex Machina*) Harris.

SN: I'm very excited about that. It's about a very powerful supernatural being who is stripped of all his powers. He's cast out in the ether, and has to remember everything that once came to him naturally – so he has to relearn every incantation one at a time. To put it in modern terms, it's like what were to happen to our computers or mobile phones, we'd be hard-pressed to remember all of our friends' phone numbers, and in *Chin Music* it's like this character has to remember a warehouse of yellow pages filled with phone numbers, just so that he can spark a flame with his fingertips. Cool.

***The Criminal Macabre/30 Days Of Night* crossover, *Final Night*, is on sale in December.**

Above: *Frankenstein Alive, Alive!* - working with Bernie Wrightson is a dream come true for SN.

True Grit

Michael Avon Oeming

Best known as artist on superhero police procedural *Powers*, Michael Avon Oeming is also a writer of no little skill. Here he talks anxiety attacks, mixing the cartoony and the gritty, and driving out personal demons through violent new project, *The Victories*.

By David West

Superheroes, you could argue, are the very epitome of the alpha male. They're brave, tough and fearless – usually. But not in the hands of Michael Avon Oeming. His good guys, though they may be perfectly capable of leaping skyscrapers in a single bound, don't have it easy. Indeed, they're more than capable of suffering a panic attack in the process.

Mike's new miniseries, *The Victories*, grew out of his own personal psychological battles. "I'd been going to therapy, and discovered how to deal with a bunch of issues," he says, "especially panic attacks and anxiety" – and once again marries his stark-yet-stylised art with some very adult issues. Make no mistake, this is no 'for all ages' comic…

Comic Heroes: So, as we understand it, the idea for *The Victories* came out of the problems you'd been having…?

Michael Avon Oeming: And as I learned how to deal with them, I also discovered new paths in storytelling. I was pretty excited to bring those lessons into my writing, and from that came both *Wild Rover* for *Dark Horse Presents* and *The Victories*. These series are actually the first creator-owned projects I'm writing and drawing myself. Until now, I've always partnered with other writers and artists.

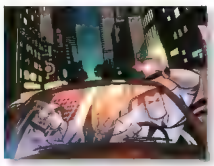
CH: The hero is called Faustus, a member of the superteam that gives the series its name and a firm believer in law and order.

MAO: I introduce him as your typical wise-cracking hero, but we soon see there is more to him than that. Like most people constantly throwing jokes around, it's a defensive measure to protect himself from the world around him. He's at a turning point in his life where events all conspire to either break him, or make him a full and whole person again.

BORN 'SOMEWHERE' US
INKED POWERS
NOW THE VICTORIES
MORE michaeloeming.com

CH: But, of course, no comic is complete without its bad guy. Faustus' nemesis is the Jackal, a ruthless vigilante who believes the only reward for criminals is death…

MAO: He looks at the heroes around him, people who call themselves the good guys,



and just sees hypocrites. It drives him absolutely nuts that someone like Faustus is just as much outside of the law as he is, and yet he thinks he's somehow a 'good guy' because he doesn't kill. But the bad guys Faustus and the Victories put away only go to jail for a short time, if at all.

Jackal realises vigilantes make their own rules anyway, so when he finds a bad guy, if he thinks that he deserves to die, he kills him. He sees himself as the person who's solving the problem, not feeding it. He's also base, animalistic and insane, so there is that.

CH: You're obviously a firm believer that the superhero genre can be used for more than just tales of muscular men in tights beating each other up…

MAO: I love the iconology of superheroes, but I often get bored with the 'cops and robbers' feel of most comics – even when they're well done: someone wants to take over the world, someone has to stop them. Great stories come from that, but it's a weird cycle we have trouble getting out of.

I think superheroes offer a great opportunity to tell personal stories. There are all these built-in metaphors with endless possibilities. Look at *The Incredibles* – each character's powers reflect their personality. You can take that direction and go a long way with it.

CH: You've said Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* is a shining example of a superhero comic that's about a lot more than just daring deeds...

MAO: Batman's relationship with age, and how time changed his friendships with Superman, Wonder Woman and Green Arrow, was way more interesting to me than the dark, gritty return of the Knight. One of the most amazing things in *Dark Knight* and *Watchmen* was how the writers created a sense of nostalgia, and not just ironic nostalgia

CH: So, *The Victories* addresses issues you've tangled with yourself.

MAO: That old saying 'write what you know' has haunted me quite a bit. About half of the stuff in *The Victories* is about me, and the rest is either based on people I know such as my mother, and her struggles with alcohol and drug addiction – or made up. *The Victories* treads over a lot of topics I think we should see more of from

CH: Not that anyone should mistake *The Victories* for a kid-friendly educational special, considering the way it promises such a generous helping of violence and mayhem...

MAO: When I work on creator-owned stuff, such as *Powers* or *The Victories*, I simply shut my filter off. Scott Allie is a great editor, and he did an amazing job of getting me to turn that filter back on when needed. The first time he looked at issue one, he thought we might have to ship it bagged, so I decided to pull back a fair bit on certain things. [All]

Be judge (jury and executioner) for yourself by checking out *The Victories* #1, available now from Dark Horse.

"I think superheroes offer a great opportunity to tell personal stories"

but a true feeling of care for a time that's passed. That's the kind of backbone I look for in stories. The rest, like giant robots attacking a city, or a bad guy trying to brainwash society, is all icing on the cake.

I don't think of *Watchmen* as an action book. I think it's much more emotional and spiritual than it is a superhero story.

our superheroes' extreme anxiety, addiction, the mental state of someone who fights crime in a mask, child molestation, and the role of heroes in society.

I'm not the first or only person looking into these issues; I just think they're subjects that need to be tackled more frequently and not treated like an after-school special.

Above: The Eternal Angels in many flavors, a blend of superhero fantasy and crime noir.

SHAPERS OF WORLDS

Monsters, Magic and Mayhem

Greg Pak

He lent new power to Hulk, but Greg Pak now has two even tougher jobs on his hands: reinvigorate Doctor Strange (who everyone loves) and Dazzler (who, er, everyone doesn't)...

By Stephen Jewell

Turning, eh? You've either got it or you don't. Greg Pak – Yale grad, indie film writer/director/actor, Marvel's go-to guy for sci-fi monster action – could be forgiven for thinking there's a chance he might not, for no sooner should he bring a five-year run writing *The Incredible Hulk* and its spin-offs to a close (he finished in Autumn last year) than Mark Ruffalo's square-headed, scene-stealing performance as both the ol' Greenskin and his tormented alter ego, Bruce Banner, in *The Avengers* movie happened. Suddenly the Hulk is flavour of the month again, and the two flawed (if broadly enjoyable) cinematic solo outings largely forgotten· out of the blue, everyone's clamoring for more Hulk again. Hey-ho.

Still, it's not like the New York based author and filmmaker has exactly been left out in the cold. He's got plenty on his plate not least a recent relaunch of *X-Treme X-Men* with artist Stephen Segovia. Spinning out of his recent *Astonishing X-Men* arc 'Exalted,' it finds Dazzler – of all people – taking centre stage as she crosses dimensions to team up with alternate universe versions of Wolverine, Nightcrawler and Emma Frost. And if that wasn't enough, Pak had also just finished his script for next month's Emma Rios illustrated *Doctor Strange: Season One* graphic novel when *Comic Heroes* met up with him during a flying visit to London.

Comic Heroes: Having been Jade Jaws' dad for the past half-decade, did you enjoy the Hulk that cropped up in *Avengers*?

Greg Pak: I was so thrilled! First off, when I heard that they'd cast Mark Ruffalo – because he's such a great actor. And then I heard through the grapevine that the Hulk was really great in the movie. When I finally saw it, I thought it was the best depiction of the Hulk on a big screen, basically ever. They really captured both his scariness and his fun, and the audience I was with just exploded when the Hulk first did his thing.

And that's definitely the way it should be. They totally got the way that the Hulk interacts with the other characters, and the fun that you can have between, say, the Hulk and Thor.

BORN DALLAS, TEXAS
HIGH INCREDIBLE HULK
NOW X-TREME X-MEN
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"I had a great time writing the Hulk and I'd love to do it again"

CH: So, d'you miss writing the guy?

GP: Banner and the Hulk are characters that I feel I just kinda got. There are certain characters that, for whatever reason, I feel almost immediately at home with when I start writing them – Adama was like that when I was writing Dynamite's *Battlestar Galactica* series way back when – and Hulk is the same. Lots of times these are characters who aren't terribly talky, and say less than they think. I had a great time writing the Hulk, and I'd love to do it again some day – but I was also happy to finish the big story that I'd started.

CH: And now you're away in another direction, doing *X-Treme X-Men*...

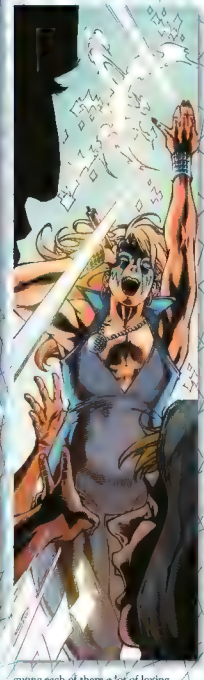
GP: If you'd asked me five years ago what character I'd be writing now, I would not have said Dazzler! But I'm actually really psyched about it, because it's been a while since I've written a female lead and I kind of made my bones doing that on the *Phoenix Endsong* books, my *Robot Stories* short films (four of them packaged together did the film festival circuit nearly a decade ago now, and cleaned up loads of awards) also had strong female characters. But then

I wrote the *Hulk* and *War Machine* There are strong female characters in all those books too, of course, but to work with a heroine as the lead is something I've been hungry to do for a while.

CH: But come on, it's *Dazzler*...?
GP: Actually, she's one of those characters who has a really strong civilian identity, which is a very powerful thing in superhero comics, you can do a huge amount with that in terms of building a character. Dazzler as a pop star is just brilliant. It's a fun sphere to play in, and it ties into her power, which is generating light from sound. There's also that whole *VH1 Behind The Music* thing, the story of the rise, fall and comeback of a pop star, which is a great framing device

CH: Okay, we're (tentatively) sold. But *X-Treme X-Men* is not just about Dazzler, of course...
GP: For sure! With Kid Nightcrawler we took that bon vivant, swashbuckler style of Kurt Wagner, the 'real' Nightcrawler that we all love, and epitomised it in a kid – one who is also vulnerable *because* he's a kid. We've got an alternate universe Wolverine too. He calls himself Howlett, and is a former Governor General of Canada and a special envoy to Shangri-la, so he's got a special link to the magical side of the Marvel Universe.

CH: Speaking of magic, you're also retelling the story of Doctor Strange's early days in a Season One graphic novel.
GP: The mandate for all the Season One books [fresh tellings of the famous origin stories, aimed – at least in part – at attracting new readers] is that they can stand alone like an evergreen, but at the same time we're playing



with a story that fits into Marvel continuity – and adds something special to Doctor Strange's character and his past

We're stepping in right at the end of the classic origin story of Doctor Strange, just after he's become the Ancient One's apprentice but before he becomes a hero. We'll also see Strange and Wong together for the first time, and they've got a fun, antagonistic kind of buddy relationship

CH: And is Emma Rios – the Spanish artist, best known here for her work on the *Strange* and *Osborn* miniseries at Marvel, and Boom! Studios' *Haven* – doing the best work of her life here, or what?
GP: She's basically got a crush on both Wong and Strange, so she's

Above: *Doctor Strange: Season One* #1's Mystical Arts Training: The Early Years

giving each of them a lot of loving attention, it's fantastic in terms of character work and emotion

CH: You're also writing *Dead Man's Run* for Aspen Comics and Gale Anne Hurd's Valhalla Productions...
GP: Ben Roberts from Valhalla rang me up and said *'Jailbreak* from Hell', and I was, like, 'Sign me up!' It's a supernatural action-thriller, so it's different to what I ordinarily do at Marvel. But then I've done loads of different stuff at Marvel over the years, historical crime with The Red Skull, monster action with the Hulk, and now a magic story with Doctor Strange. That's one of the glories of comics, working in all those different genres

***Doctor Strange: Season One* is out in September; *X-Treme X-Men* you can pick up now.**

Norse Code

Denise Mina

Perhaps the oddest, most compelling superhero in recent fiction doesn't have any superpowers (well, not as such), and has never appeared in comic books. That is, until now...

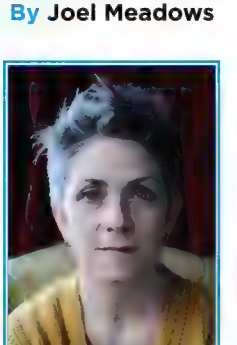
By Joel Meadows

The crime author/comic book writer crossover is hardly an unusual one – Greg Rucka springs immediately to mind, and Max Allan Collins but remains perhaps more common on the other side of the Atlantic; here it's fantasy guys, from Neil Gaiman to Mike Carey, who tend to make the leap from panels to prose and back again.

Denise Mina – Scottish author of 'tartan noir', her crime novels including *Sanctum*, *Still Midnight* and *The Field Of Blood*, this last recently adapted for TV by the BBC – is a UK exception; her books are as cynical and world-weary as the best of them, making her a perfect fit for the Vertigo end of the comic-book spectrum. Indeed, her stint writing *Hellblazer* five or so years back – and her original graphic novel, *A Sickness In The Family*, in 2010 – seemed to announce a hefty comic book career, one that then seemed to falter as a new crime trilogy, the Alex Morrow series, and other projects snaffled up all her time.

But now 2012 sees her return to comics, and to Vertigo, with her highest profile gig yet: the graphic novel adaptation of Stieg Larsson's *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo*, first of his celebrated (and huge-selling) *Millennium* trilogy. Mixing financial journalism with ancient family scandal and 'locked-room' murder mystery, it's a twisty, atmospheric, not-particularly-fast-moving thing notable for chilly Swedish locations and two dynamic central characters: crusading journo (and unlikely middle-aged babe magnet) Mikael Blomkvist and his scene-stealing, punky, computer hacking assistant, Lisbeth Salander.

It's a daunting task, you might think – not only is the story extremely long, but with two film series on the go and *everyone* having read the paperback, you'd imagine most people would know exactly what happens already ...!



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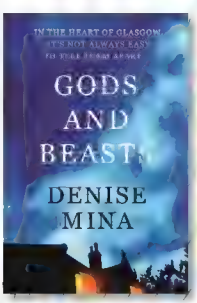
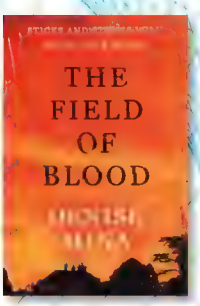
Comic Heroes: How did you first get involved with this? Were you a fan?
Denise Mina: My agent in New York contacted me, and said, 'I don't know if you'd be interested, but DC Comics asked me to ask you'. They had to get the estate of Stieg Larsson to okay everything I wrote; it seems they were the ones who'd actually asked for me, and they were very surprised when I said yes.

One of the first things I thought was that although there are some fantastic bits in this book, there are others I'm not so keen on – things I thought were a bit muddled. When the books were first published, I don't think anybody had any idea how well they'd do; I don't think they were edited much at the time, and then they got translated as they were because they'd done quite well in Swedish. They're quite flabby, but there are brilliant bits, if Larsson was alive I think he'd have edited them later.

CH: We'd imagine this was a first for you, adapting someone else's work?
DM: In this case, it was brilliant. If you've worked with a lot of really great editors who know what they're doing – like I have – it all makes sense on the other side of the process. When you're changing it for a comic book, the first thing is that you can't really have any internal monologue or internal exposition. Comics are so stripped down, the narrative has to be really clean – and so I found I was editing out all the bits that I didn't really feel

> **"Some of the passages are really beautiful and moving"**





worked, and slightly altering things to make it an external exposition. So it was really more like an editing job than anything else.

CH: It's quite a long book, isn't it? And though the graphic novel's thick, it's not *that* thick...

DM: I think our version of the story is maybe 280 pages long. And it has a different running order, because it's not just a transposition. You have to make everything make sense for the comic adaptation.

There's a lot of Salander's internal thinking in the book, so when she goes to the house of someone who's blatantly a rapist, and she's really smart and her awareness is really heightened, it doesn't really make sense for her not to take a weapon along. Things like that. You have to make it make sense visually, rather than in terms of her internal thought process. As well as being true to the book, you have to change the ways you present the characters processing information.

CH: You've worked with artist Leonardo Manco before, of course...

DM: Yeah, DC got Manco and Andrea Mutti [best known, perhaps, for Vertigo's *DMZ*] as well. Leo and I worked together on *Hellblazer*, so we get on and argue very well with each other! Not that we've ever actually met. At one point we were supposed to be at a festival in Stockholm together, but his passport didn't come through and so he never got to come. So I'm starting to wonder if he really exists, or if he's just a machine. . .

CH: If this is a hit – and we'd imagine it will be – there must be plans to adapt the other two novels in the Lisbeth Salander/*Millennium* sequence...?

DM: They're going to issue the first one and see how it does. What's really nice is that the peak of interest is over, so I get to do a really interesting project for a market that may or may not be there!

For me it's a really interesting academic exercise, because I think even people who really love the book will, by now, be finding some of it quite tiresome. Whether or not it works I really don't know. I'm not actually sure if there's still an appetite, or whether people have moved on to something else by now.

If the graphic novel had come out two or three years ago, it would have just been another product – like the keychain or the t-shirt – but now a bit of time has passed, so it's a thing that will stand on its own.

I have to say, though, that some of the passages in it are really beautiful and really moving because you have to make sense of Salander's experience.

Above: Mikael Blomkvist got fame when it comes to dark, brooding heroes

and Leonardo's done some of this stuff amazingly well. [SH]

***The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo* graphic novel, with its lovely Lee Bermejo cover, is due in November.**

Kiss Me Deadly

Sean Phillips

Some artists work best in a genre; Sean Phillips works best in a mood. Whatever he's tackling, his stark blacks and rough lines hide a million shades of grey.

By Stephen Jewell

When you think of modern crime comics, chances are the first thing that springs to mind is the ongoing success of the Ed Brubaker and Sean Phillips team – they won Best Limited Series at the recent Eisner Awards in San Diego for 2011's *Criminal: Last Of The Innocents*, after all, and they must surely stand an excellent chance of being nominated next year, *at least*, for their current comic book exploration of the evil that men do, *Fatale*.

Thus, the latest in a series of collaborations that dates back to 2001's Elseworlds one-shot *Batman: Gotham Noir*, is a dark supernatural thriller with a noir sensibility, and the long-time partners-in-crime's first project for the currently surging Image Comics.

One of the independent hits of the year, it taps a shadowy, hardboiled vein that the pair discovered first at DC, on *WildC.A.T's* spin-off *Sleeper*, before the first *Criminal* installment, 'Coward', was published by Marvel's creator-owned imprint Icon in 2006.

Since then they've produced five further volumes of the self-contained (but interlinking) *Criminal* crime stories, and teamed up on two series of a similarly gritty supervillain series, *Incognito*.

Despite the very American feel of all these books, artist Sean Phillips is based in Lancaster; we caught up with him for a pint just before the British launch of the first *Fatale* trade paperback, *Death Chases Me*.

Comic Heroes: Let's kick off with *Fatale*: how did you and Ed come up with the idea for this one?

Sean Phillips: Ed said that he had an idea for another noir-type thing, but it also had a bit of horror in it, so he asked me if I fancied doing it. I just said 'okay', and that was as far as it went – I don't tell him what to write, and he doesn't tell me what to draw.

I trust him to give me a story that I'll like. The way we've always worked is that he never tells me what's going to happen, because I don't like knowing that I've got something hard to draw in five months' time.

BORN UK
HIGH CRIMINAL
NOW FATALE
MORE www.seanphillips.co.uk

"Jo is based on a particular actress, but I won't say who it is..."

CH: You've hopped around the publishers with your various noir collaborations; what made you decide to go to Image with this one?

SP: We've been perfectly happy doing stuff for Icon and Marvel, it's just that Robert Kirkman had asked Ed if he wanted to do something for Image. We couldn't take *Criminal* there, because there was no reason to leave Marvel, so we thought that if we were going to go with Image, it would have to be with something new. So Ed came up with the idea for *Fatale*.

CH: *Fatale*'s first story arc flits between the '50s and the present day. Some artists love doing period research, others hate it; where do you fall?

SP: Back in the day, it was quite difficult to research all this stuff – but now, with the arrival of the internet, it's relatively easy. The second arc, which we're doing at the moment, is set in the '70s, so I asked Ed what films he recommended I look at. It's not necessarily for the clothes, but more things like how many cars there were on the street back then – you can find a million photos of modern LA on Flickr.

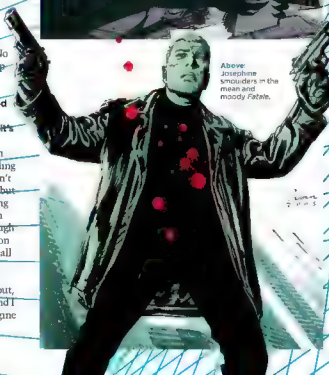
Although period stuff is still a bit more of a challenge, I do enjoy it. There was a flashback in the first volume of *Fatale* where I had to draw a '20s street, so I looked at some old black and white Harold Lloyd silent movies. It's fun – it just takes bloody ages!

CH: The seemingly ageless Josephine is the one constant between the various eras in *Fatale*. Do you vary how you draw her, depending on the fashions of the day?

SP: Only when it comes to her clothes, as Josephine's hairstyle and facial features tend to stay the same. For the '70s scenes, I've done her with really plucked eyebrows like they had back then. When I first drew her in the '70s, I did her with more of a Bianca Jagger type haircut, but Ed said that you couldn't even tell that it was the same person anymore. Especially because the way I draw comics is not detailed or subtle enough to have two dark, long-haired women in the same picture, one of them has to be blonde, otherwise you can't tell who's who, no matter how well I draw her face! Jo is based on a particular actress, but I won't say who it is. No one's guessed it yet, but it does help to give her some consistency.

CH: *Fatale* was originally scheduled to run for 12 issues, but it's now been expanded to 15. We assume it's going well...

SP: And it might end up being even longer than that, because Ed is finding it quite hard to fit it all in! I wouldn't say it's decompressed storytelling, but we're in no hurry to spell everything out. We still don't know that much about Josephine, because even though she's the star of the book she isn't on that many pages. The first arc was all about the bent policeman and the second arc is all someone else, I've got no idea who the third arc is about, because I haven't got that far yet and I don't know how it ends. But I imagine it's the guy reading the book in the present day



Above: Josephine smoulders in the mean and moody *Fatale*.

CH: You recently did one of the variant covers for *The Walking Dead* #100...

SP: I got that job because I'm working with Image, not because I already know Robert Kirkman and Charlie Adlard. Crap way to get a run on 100.

CH: But you worked with Kirkman on the first two *Marvel Zombies* series, way back in 2005/6, years before *The Walking Dead* became popular.

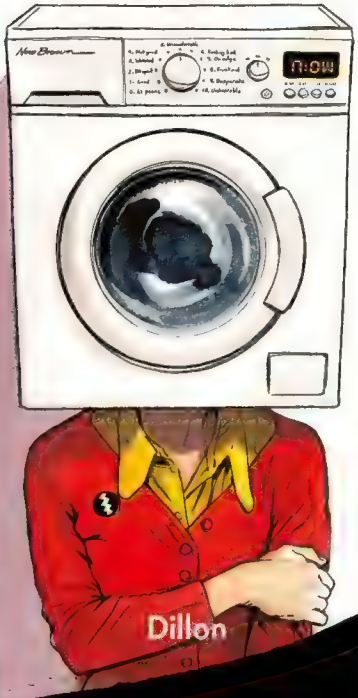
SP: He's obviously doing all right with his zombies! We never knew that it would take off like it did, but the first volume of *Marvel Zombies* was one of Marvel's biggest selling collections of that year. Down to being near the first person who was asked to do it and Robert wasn't either. It was just one of Mark Millar's throw away ideas from his *Ultimates/Fantastic Four* rank and they thought that they'd do something more with it. I've no idea why it did so well. If we all knew that, we'd do it every time!

The first *Fatale* graphic novel collection is out now. *Sleeper*, *Criminal* and *Incognito* are all equally worth tracking down.

Things aren't always black and white

£16.99
208pp HB
Graphic novel
September 2012
ISBN 9781906838423

THE NAO OF BROWN



"The artwork makes me jealous, the storytelling makes me even more jealous and the watercolour painting just pisses me off!"

Jamie Hewlett

SELF MADE HERO

WOLVERINE

THE COMPLETE RUNT

"I'm the best there is at what I do,"

says that spiky-handed little killing machine, the most edgy superhero of recent years. "But what I do best isn't very nice." Perhaps not, bub, yet it sure is popular... By Matt Bielby

So here he is, Marvel's unluckiest superstar: a short arse character designer John Romita had him at around 5ft 3in, 5ft 5in initially, though some Hugh Jackman-influenced artists seem to have forgotten this of late), a grumpy killer. Oh, and a Canadian – not some made-up Wakandan or Asgardian butt, from an American perspective, a genuine *foreigner*. Not, on the surface of it, a surefire hit character – or even an easy guy to like.

Not that we did like him that much on first meeting. This pint-size aggro-machine in his weird military superhero suit, a bighead with his cocksure attitude and those nasty looking claws. Admire him? Oh yes, we could perhaps do that. Anyone who – without conspicuous superpowers – is willing to throw himself into the nux with ol' greenskin and the magically steroidal Wendigo certainly has some cojones. This, of course, was in *Incredible Hulk* #181, Wolverine's first full appearance. Here he's presented as a mystery man, some sort of Canadian super agent, of whom we learn little beyond his super-competent professionalism, demonstrated by a surprisingly extensive internal monologue! and what we can glean from the intensity of his attacks.

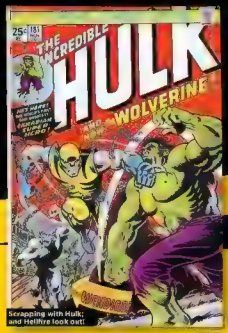
This was a new sort of superhero, if he could be *called* a superhero: angry, violent and unpredictable. Hulk and Wendy are both massive monsters, so all this guy could really do was hurt them a little, annoy them, still, you couldn't help worrying about the potential everyday use of such claws. What if this vicious, short-tempered little guy started using the three blades attached to each hand like *Daredevil* baddy Gladiator's buzzsaws, it seemed... on regular, oh so soft humans?

One thing seemed clear: the only reason nobody was dying here was because the folk at Marvel had put him up against opponents that were so bloody big.

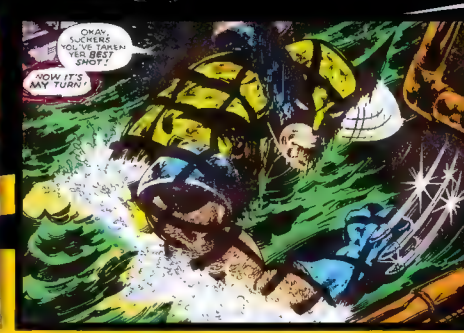
Wolverine was a striking visual, and intriguing psychological case, right from the »

YOU DEAD YET, YOU BASTARD?
MAYBE I'M JUST GETTING STARTED!
WHY NOT TRY YOUR LUCK AGAIN?
SNIKT!
THAT'S WOLVERINE!
WE'LL SEE, BUB!
WHO'S YOUR DADDY?
WELL, I'LL BE A SON OF A BITCH!
The original Wolvie: loving the whiskers!

A. images - Marvel Comics



Scrapping with Hulk, and Hellfire look out!



off, then – but little immediately suggested that this was a hero with legs, and that within five years he'd be the hottest character on the hottest team in comics.

Or, indeed, that nearly 40 years later he'd be one of the most famous, more valuable superheroes – fictional characters, even – on the planet. (And certainly the only one created since that fierce early '60s Lee/Kirby/Ditko explosion of creativity at Marvel that's worthy of legitimate comparison with the mega giants – Superman, Batman, Spider-Man.)

So how did he get there? What inspiration was behind him? And why did Wolverine click with so many people, so quickly? Here's the quick version – some design, plenty of luck, and that age-old story – he was the right guy, in the right place, at the right time. Something a little longer is detailed over the following pages.

Like as a Hulk villain is a limited one, and, though Hulk/Wolverine fights have become, over the years, almost as hardy a perennial as Hulk/Thor or Hulk/Thing, Wolverine's next appearances would be in a very different venue. Though some younger fans may think of him as mostly a solo hero – these days – or even 'mostly an Avenger' – almost all Wolvie's popularity comes from his role as the outsider on the most outsider of all teams – the superhero who gets everyone's back up, who *nobody* likes. And with reason – early doors, it was never clear exactly when he'd snap – cut loose', as he'd have it – and damage someone.

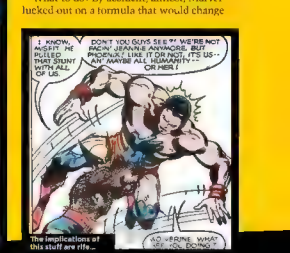
Wolverine is, at his core, an X-Man. And though he's a supremely versatile character – an intriguing take on that old standard, the taciturn, enigmatic tough guy – he works best on the edges of a group, the prickly internal challenge to team status quo who, nevertheless, fights harder than anyone when the chips are down. Though he'd made a splash with his first appearance, certainly, his enduring stardom has precious little to do with Hulk-stabbings, and is instead intrinsically tied up with that of the other 'Children of the Atom' – and in particular, the remarkable reinvention of the X-Men in 1975, the most successful makeover in the saga of the comics.

"WOLVERINE'S THE NAME, MAYHEM'S THE GAME!"

Things were not good. As so often in the American industry, a feeling of doom was in the air. The market itself was disappearing, comic book sales contracting – and it wasn't clear what could be done to save them. At Marvel, *Spider-Man* was rocking his way though the original 'Clone Saga', but that was a rare bright spot. *Daredevil* had been cut to a bi-monthly and looked doomed. 10 Giant Size titles were cut, and the recent horror revival had crashed and burned – *Dracula Lives*, both *Man Thing* books, and a dozen others were all cancelled. New ongoings (*The Champions*, *The Inhumans*, *The Invaders*) hardly promised to set the world alight, and meanwhile, across town, DC was whacking up its prices to 25c across the board.

What to do? By accident, almost, Marvel lucked out on a formula that would change

HE'S SCARED--CAN'T SAY AS I BLAME HIM, EITHER. LET'S SEE IF I CAN'T MAKE HIM FEEL WORSE!
HEY, BUB. I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE THINKIN'.
'HE'S HURT, AN' HE'S FIVE METRES AWAY FROM ME, AN' I GOT A FULL CLIP OF AMMO IN MY RIFLE.
"QUESTION IS: CAN I KILL WOLVERINE BEFORE HE CAN REACH ME AN' CUT ME INTO B'ISH-KEBAB WITH THOSE FREAKY CLAWS OF HIS?"
WELL, BUB, WOLVERINE IS VIRTUALLY UNKILLABLE.
WOLVERINE'S CLAWS ARE ADAMANTIUM, THE STRONGEST METAL KNOWN. CAPABLE OF SLICIN' THROUGH VANADIUM STEEL LIKE A HOT KNIFE THROUGH BUTTER.
AN' FIVE METRES O' FLOC AIN'T MUCH DISTANCE AT ALL - FER ME.
IT'S YOUR PLAY, HERO. I'M WAITIN'.
Wolverine goes all Clint: feel lucky, punk?


I KNOW, MISFIT. HE PULLED THAT STUNT WITH ALL OF US.
DON'T YOU GUYS SEE?! WE'RE NOT FACIN' JEANNIE ANYMORE. BUT PHOENIX? LIKE IT OR NOT, IT'S US-- AN' MAYBE ALL HUMANITY -- OR HER!
NO--PRIME WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
The implications of this stuff are rife...

Name's Wolverine. I'm one o' the good guys"

International Man of Mystery

But who, or what, is he? The comics certainly took their time letting us know...

The basics of Wolverine we got from the off – he was short, feisty, ultra-violent, and equipped with an unbreakable adamantium skeleton, viciously sharp claws and a mutant healing factor that just wouldn't quit. In other words, you could beat him up as much as you liked – in *Uncanny X-Men* #140, a rematch with Sandigo, the huge wood-creature smashed him into trees and ground repeatedly – but he wouldn't break, just bleed on you, groan a bit, then get up and start again. (He's like Rocky this way: many of Wolverine's greatest fights feature a comeback, just when it looked like a larger, stronger opponent had him beat.)

Some pretty basic man-with-no-name stuff is at his core, then, and the success of Wolverine is – in large part – down to the fact that you don't *need* to know anything about him to understand him. He's the beer-swilling, cigar-smoking loner – zen and vicious, both – who can always surprise with thought and action. These are essentials, but people – of course – soon wanted to know more. Wolverine's past was always shrouded in mystery (his years before the Canadian Secret Service a secret, it seemed, from him and us both) but rarely has such a thing been milked quite so successfully and extensively. Slowly, over decades rather than years, a few pieces got filled in: a super-soldier project called Weapon X; a 'real' name, Logan; the extent of his powers and abilities (his 'healing factor' becoming increasingly unlikely over time, to the point where he's now virtually un-killable, being able to regenerate any damaged or destroyed body tissue within seconds).

Initially Len Wein had intended Wolverine to be an angry teen; a Cockrum sketch of him, unmasked and looking more like 40, soon nixed that. Hints and teases about his background spilled out from the off, many contradicting each other; might he be a talking, mutated version of the actual Wolverine animal? Why did super-science scans reveal him to be somehow different to the other X-Men? What's his relationship to the similar Sabretooth, an old Iron Fist villain? Every answer, or pseudo-answer, brought new questions, and Logan still had the capability for surprise. When Cockrum first depicted him unmasked, in *Uncanny* #98, it was a revelation, for instance. His hair followed the same bizarre shape as his mask!

Wolverine's 'complete' origin – there are still gaps – was eventually revealed in the miniseries, *Origin*, in 2001-2002. He'd been born James Howlett to a rich couple in 1880s Alberta, but was actually the illegitimate son of a vicious Mellors-like groundsman, Thomas Logan; it's the healing factor that keeps him looking so young, while his claws are actually natural bone under all that adamantium.

His Jean Grey-obsession was explained, too – his childhood friend, Rose, had looked just like her, but the young James had accidentally killed her with his claws. He's lived amongst wolves, and American Indians; he's made homes in Japan and the Yukon; he's fought in both World Wars, been married at least twice, and had assorted loved ones killed by Sabretooth (who turns out to be neither father or brother, despite numerous hints to the contrary).

Some of all this might even turn out to be *true*. With comic book characters, and Wolverine in particular, you can never quite be sure...

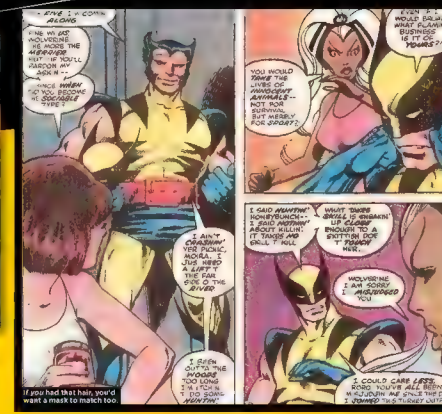
"All Wolvie's popularity comes from his role as the outsider on the most outsider of all teams"

the industry - and, in retrospect, the secret was obvious: make a comic the kids actually *wanted* to read.

It started with Marvel President Arthur Landau, and his less-than promising idea for a team of international heroes, boasting one from each of the foreign territories where Marvel was making inroads. Roy Thomas figured it might work with the X-Men, since they already had an Irishman, Banshee, hanging around, and nobody cared much what happened to those guys, they hadn't been able to carry their own book for one full of original material, at least for five years.

Immediately, the plan went right – and wrong – Right in that Thomas sold the concept to writer Len Wein, then the pair promptly tempted keen-to-leave artist Dave Cockrum over from DC's *Legion Of Superheroes*. Cockrum was an unspectacular penciller, but a great ideas man – he'd added an impressive number of enduring new character designs to *Legion* during his stint there – and he brought with him notebooks packed with oddball hero concepts 'Wrong', in that somewhere along the way the idea of appealing to major foreign markets became a bit lost – and by the time Wein and Cockrum were done they'd somehow got a Kenyan, a Russian and an American Indian on the team. Indeed, of the initial batch, only the German – weird looking though he was – would

Artists love Wolverine; the claws look fab!


I GIVE IT A COMIC ALONG
FINE WITH ME, WOLVERINE, BE MORE THE MERRIER! VISIT THE MOULIN ROUGE AGAIN?
SINCE WHEN DO YOU BECOME SOCIABLE, THEE?
I AIN'T CHAUBIN' YER PICNIC, MORAL. I JUST NEED A FAT FISH, O' THE RIVER
I SUPPOSE IT'S THE DOORS I'M KICKING IN, YOU?
IF YOU had that hair, you'd want a mask to match too
EVEN SO, WOULD DALIN WHAT PLANETARY BUSINESS IS IT O' YOURS?
YOU WOULD TAKE THE LIVES OF INNOCENT ANIMALS -- NOT FOR SURVIVAL, BUT MERELY FOR SPORT?
I SAID MUNTIN' HONEYBUNCH -- I SAID HUNTING ABOUT KILLIN' IT TAKES AND SKILL. T' KILL
WHAT TAKES SKILL IS SNEAKIN' UP CLOSE ENOUGH TO A SKITTISH DOE T' PERMIT HER...
WOLVERINE I AM SORRY I MISJUDGED YOU
I COULD CARE LESS. YOU'RE ALL BORN MISJUDGIN' ME SINCE THE DAY I JOINED THIS TURKEY OUTFIT

seem to promise *any* additional overseas sales.) Plus, of course, there was Wein's recent Canadian invention, a vicious little sod rescued from Hulk obscurity. He wasn't very nice, but he added friction – and Canada had become an important market.

The relaunch issue – *Giant Size X-Men* #1 – was an okay comic, and the new ongoing that was to follow seemed to promise little more. Certainly, it was beset by problems, not least that Wein was taking over from Thomas as editor in chief and needed to drop the book fast, tossing it to the nearest, most enthusiastic safe pair of hands. This, it turned out, was Chris Claremont, a young editorial assistant who'd written a few *Iron Fist* issues – but wasn't even primarily a writer, not really. A struggling actor, Claremont worked at Marvel to make ends meet, but brought certain crucial skills to bear: a love of dialogue, an actor's self-confidence, an expertise at getting inside the head of each character. Though he over-plotted and certainly over-wrote (many panels would be absolutely *crammed* with words), and showed certain stylistic oddities fans would soon pick up on, he made the characters breathe. Mix this buzzing quality with Cockrum's energetic, if scrappy, art and a low key hit seemed likely.

> **"The intriguing, bickering team dynamic was responsible for much of *X-Men*'s success"**

But Claremont had something else on his side: staying power – and he was given time to grow. Slowly the stories got stronger, the characters richer, soon, *X-Men* would emerge as the book to turn the company around. And it didn't hurt that one of its oddball stars was slowly achieving genuine cult status.

"WAY TO GO, RUSSKIE!"

Early on, of course, *Uncanny X-Men* was not Wolverine's book, not nearly. Old guys – like original X-Man Cyclops – were still around, and others – Storm, the serene African, Colossus – the giant Russian farm boy – seemed to interest Claremont and Cockrum more. Claremont was particularly fond of the girls, it seemed, while Cockrum doted on Nightcrawler, the monster-faced swashbuckling German – it was the rare issue where Wolverine didn't spend most of the time lurking in the background, taking centre stage only for the odd irate comment – or when extreme violence followed, perhaps, by a little soul-searching and regret) was required.

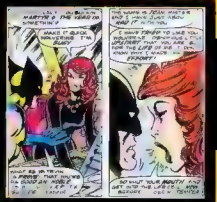
The intriguing, bickering team dynamic was responsible for much of *X-Men*'s slow burning success, but other factors contributed too. One was that it brought *Star Wars*-style space adventure – so hot and fresh at the cinema – to comics really for the first time. Soon we'd have ill-defined but formidable new cosmic powers for Jean Grey, another original X-Man, now returned to the team, a vast new space empire, the bird-like Shi'ar, whose machinations kept impacting on the merry mutants, even a Han Solo-like space pirate, Corsair, with his "I am your

father" secret. Sales were growing, soon faster than those of any other comic – but still, really, Wolverine had very little to do with it in the overall scheme of things.

But his time was coming, and when Cockrum temporarily fell out with Marvel, as it seems, he had with DC not so long before), Claremont's old *Iron Fist* collaborator, John Byrne leapt on board. Cleaner, crisper, infinitely sexier than Cockrum's, Byrne's art combined the sheer size and cosmic audaciousness of a Jim Starlin with open, cartoony faces, extensive background detail, and some of the finest women in comics.

Claremont was good with the ladies too, as already noted, and – with Byrne – pushed them increasingly to the front of the mix. Jean and Storm soon became the two most important characters in the book – but the Canadian Byrne, especially, knew that all this XX chromosome stuff needed its counterbalance too, and that his fellow countryman could

Great Silver Samurai scrap by Paul Smith.


OH BOY! IS MARTYR'S THE YEAR OF SOMETHING?
MAKE IT BLOOD WOLVERINE TM DAY!
THE NAME'S JEAN. JEAN GREY. AND I THINK I'LL JUST HAVE WHAT IT'S HAVING.
I'VE HAD ENOUGH OF YOU. BOUNCER! THROW THIS LOUD-MOUTHED JERK OUT ON HIS EAR!
WHAT DO WE TELL A BIKER WHO'S BEEN BEATEN UP BY A GIRL?
NOTHING. WE DON'T SEE ANYTHING.
SO WHAT YOUR MOUTH NEEDS IS SOMETHING TO DO!

"Love. Who needs it?"

Owner of a Lonely Heart

A lover or a fighter? Wolvie's actually both. If only his 'frails' didn't keep getting killed...

In *Uncanny X-Men* #98, Dr Stephen Lang, crazed creator of the Sentinels, has the X-Men tied up, and at one point slaps a lippy Jean Grey. Well, our boy isn't going to stand for that. Wolverine bursts free – for the first time revealing that the claws come from his body, not his gloves – and, when a soon-released Jean complains she can't fight in her long ballgown, rips the bottom off, grinning wolfishly.

Later, in #100, Jean is making her fateful decision to pilot the X-Men's space shuttle to safety (cue: Phoenix Force, and storylines still reverberating today), and shouts down his protests: "I've tried to like you – obnoxious little upstart that you are – but for the life of me, I don't know why I made the effort!"

Anyone ever seen a rom-com? There's sexual tension here, and it frightens Wolverine (later he takes Jean flowers in hospital, thinking 'never felt like this before, all hot and bothered over a frail'); by #137, the climax to 'Dark Phoenix', she's constantly on his mind. "Nobody understands Jeannie like I do," he figures.

He loves her alright. It's a potential relationship successive writers have teased us with over the years, but – like Namor/Sue Storm – it's perhaps better unresolved. The closer they get to the precipice, the more thrilling it becomes.

He's had some life, has Wolverine, and unsurprisingly there've been women in it: we know of two marriages, various long-term relationships (notably Silver Fox, a Blackfoot Indian with mysteries of her own, and Mariko Yashida, heir to a Japanese crime family); and assorted ships-in-the-night moments with everyone from Mystique to Storm's wild-child friend, Yukio. Not being exactly the settling-down type, however, it's difficult to see how any could have lasted...

Fun with the claws in this image-era fight

Barry W-S: just can't get enough of drawing wires.

be at Together the new team sped up the socialisation of their half-punt predator, softening the raw aggression having him bond with team mates Nightcrawler, who he's now drinking buddies with and Colossus (who he schools in being a man! Wolverine's arrogant nature began to be played for gentle laughs, and key, memorable Wolverine moments started to crop up virtually every issue

So, in #109 – the new creative team's second issue – we get the most striking Wolverine fight scene yet, full of large and dramatic portraits of the guy, as he resists forced repatriation, and in #111 we get his extended efforts to break the steel chains that hold him. Then in #114 he kills a Savage Land pterosaur, blood and bits flying

And it got better. When, in #115 Wolverine leaps to the attack in a double-page splash, we're left in no doubt as to who's the new star of the show. And nor are the implications of this glossed over: the following issue Wolverine (off-panel but unmistakably) kills a guard in front of a shocked Nightcrawler and Storm. The guy was no immediate danger to them, just in the way, and suddenly the coolest character in comics is explicitly stated to be a cold-blooded killer. Fandom and the industry alike exploded with comment and opinion, Marvel tied itself in knots explaining what 'really' happened – and it was clear that mainstream American superhero comics had just stepped over an important line.

But Wolverine's real defining moment, perhaps, was still to come. In #122 – with Colossus losing his nerve and in danger of being squished by a massive Danger Room crushing machine – and an annoyed Cyclops about to turn the thing off – Wolverine sabotages the controls so it can't be stopped, then climbs into the killing zone with the young Russian. Either the kid finds the strength to make the all-important extra effort, or both will die. The Russian pulls through, of course, and Wolverine grins at him. "Way to go, Russkie!" he says!

Smiling and smoking, so confident and so willing to risk it all. Wolverine the teacher begins here. Magnificently macho, endearingly mad, this sort of stuff was making our boy sympathetic without ever obliging him to show his tender side – and the mixed message was intriguing.

There was plenty of Clint Eastwood to this depiction of Wolverine, the red blooded, overly masculine alpha male even the softest *X Men* readers – nice, sensitive boys on the whole, though girls and gay guys trot that Marvel ever liked to talk about that much!) were increasingly joining their ranks – could love (Claremont and Byrne were well aware of what a broad church they were preaching to, however – they knew their take on *X Men* had a wide appeal beyond that of virtually any other superhero property, and weren't afraid of a little tan service. Storm was forever getting naked behind carefully placed plants and rain clouds, while the excessively hirsute beat like Wolverine's shirtless scenes, which Byrne kept dropping in, could easily be read as sly little guts for a different demographic!

"NOW IT'S MY TURN!"

The Byrne Claremont years are full of fine Wolverine moments, but one more demands particular examination. It is, of course, in #132 – mid-point of the epic 'Dark Phoenix' saga – and the X Men are on the ropes. Their infiltration of a New York blue-blood secret society, the Hellfire Club, has gone badly

"Wolverine never backs off from a fight!"

Street Fighting Man

All superheroes brawl, but few enjoy it quite like this fella...

When a man comes equipped with weapons like he does, and has 'vicious' or 'violent' a key part of any legitimate character profile, you'd expect there to be fights – and, indeed, much of the appeal of Wolverine comes down to the simple fact that he's such a scrapper, purpose-built for the nastiest, most blood-splattered battles superhero comics can provide.

Perhaps uniquely, he seems suited for *any* sort of fight. Since his levels of super-strength are so ill-defined – is he stronger than a regular guy? If so, by how much? – he can work in both a street-level after-pub brawl and a full-on donnybrook with the likes of Hulk, equally well; you couldn't say the same about, say, Daredevil. Early doors, the clearly lethal potential of Wolverine's attacks the likes of Claremont and Cockrum to run scared: their boy would fight monsters and robots, mostly, with the full blood-and-guts ferocity implicit in the character only really coming to the fore under Byrne.

Since then, many of the greatest Wolverine battles have been against those using similar claws or bladed weapons, and willing to exhibit comparable ferocity: a fight with Silver Samurai in *Uncanny* #173, in which new artist Paul Smith took many pages to show all the thrusts and parries, was memorable, while assorted Sabretooth fights are suitably brutal.

More than is the case with most heroes, great Wolverine fights usually rely not on imaginative settings, nor clever use of superpowers, but on great art: you want the ferocity of cats-and-dogs going at it, an ability to realistically depict painfully twisted muscle and ripped flesh, blood and spittle flying everywhere. This being the case, Barry Windsor-Smith, though he's drawn relatively few Wolverine comics, has to sit near the top of the pile. In his 'Weapon X' series from 1981 – and rare issues of *Uncanny*, like #205, in which Wolverine and Lady Deathstrike rip each other to shreds – he depicts dramatic snapshots of well-choreographed action, not light on the bodily fluids and often set against atmospheric snow or under strange lighting.

More recently, the likes of Miller/John Romita Jr mid-Noughties run on Wolverine's own title provided perhaps *the* most intense, back-to-back barrage of fight scenes. Just about everyone was pitched against him at one point or another: many of the Marvel U's big players, as well as countless Hydra goons and super-ninjas, and new creations like 'the Gorgon', current boss of secret society The Hand. Plus, anything else Miller thought it might be worth throwing into the mix too, not least a Great White shark.

If all you're really after is full-on, claw-on-flesh action, this stuff – collected as *Wolverine: Enemy Of The State* – is not a bad place to start...

Suddenly, comics' coolest character is explicitly stated to be a cold-blooded killer

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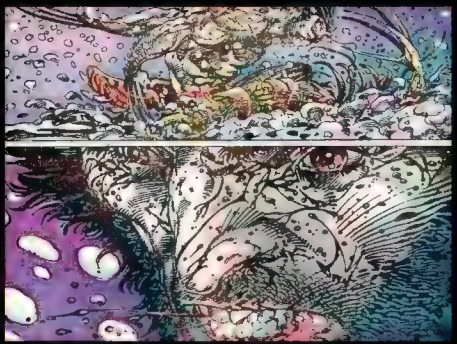


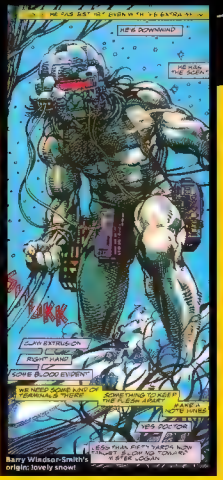
Bendis-era Wolvie: always snarling.

wrong. Jean has turned evil – is now their 'Black Queen', and has zapped loverboy Cyclops. Wolverine has been knocked near unconscious and thrown into the city's sewers. Storm and Colossus have been beaten insensible, Nightcrawler strangled. Celebrating a 'splendid victory', leader Sebastian Shaw proposes a toast – and things have rarely looked so grim for our heroes.

But now comes one of the most celebrated, best-remembered last pages in comic book history, as a hand rises from the muck of the drains far below, and a figure slowly rises. "Okay, suckers – you've taken yer best shot," says Wolverine. "Now it's my turn!"

It's not an especially big final panel – just half a page, coloured rather darkly – but Wolverine has his claws extended, a snarl on his face, an iconic pose. You simply *couldn't* miss the next issue – the inevitable against all odds fightback has rarely been announced in more dramatic fashion.

And, next issue, it didn't disappoint. Indeed, the first four pages saw Wolverine breaking back into Hellfire, killing three of the four armed guards who confront him, and giving the last a very Clint-like choice: "Question is: can I kill Wolverine before he can reach me an' cut me into sh-sh-sh kebab with those freaky claws of his? It's your play, hero. I'm wattin'." Naturally, the guy bottles it, as Wolverine considers how he's mellowed. "In the old days I wouldn't have given this punk a choice."



Barry Windsor-Smith's origin: lovely snow!

The individual chapter title for #133 had been 'Wolverine Alone!', and it was to be prophetic: Wolverine had, pretty much alone reignited interest in comics, he'd become the most popular new character in decades, and he'd changed the rules about how violent a genuine hero could get away with being.

'Alone' was also to be an increasingly important part of his future. Some breakout characters from team titles (the Thing of Fantastic Four, say) had been tried in numerous solo books, but never quite caught fire as a character outside the group dynamic, however, with a new 1982 *Wolverine* miniseries by Claremont and Frank Miller, two of the hottest comics creators at the time, Logan was to prove that this wouldn't be his fate. It was a hit – a catchphrase that first appeared here, "I'm the best there is at what I do, but what I do best isn't very nice." I had staying power, Miller's depiction of the claws as katana-like blades less so – and so was a weaker follow-up, soon an ongoing series would follow and, in time, further X-books. Wolverine was starting to become the most visible Marvel hero since Spider-Man.

These days, of course, Logan appears – no exaggeration, this – in a dozen or so comics a month – not bad for the archetypal antisocial, unappealing loner.

"Wolverine had become the most popular new character in decades"

"THIS CONVERSATION AIN'T FINISHED. NOT BY A LONG SHOT"

So, where next for Marvel's most unpredictable, intriguing and, amazingly, still coolest property? The simple answer is to say 'simply, 'everywhere'. In Marvel's

Wolverine calls everyone 'bub' at some point.

Sometimes the claws look rather longer than would fit in a forearm...

October shipping solicitations, for instance, he's one of the stars of *Uncanny Avengers* (don't ask. Or, rather, do – the answer is on page 41 and *A+X*, also *A-Babies v X-Babies* (again, don't ask), plus assorted further Avengers titles.

He's also in his own book and assorted X titles, including *Astonishing X Men*, *Wolverine & The X Men*, *Uncanny X Force*, *X Men Legacy*, and various miniseries and events (*First X-Men*, *Age Of Apocalypse*). Plus, he's got time to guest star in *Winter Soldier*, and kick off a new, parallel ongoing series – *Wolverine Max* – dedicated to especially violent Wolverine tales. Over exposure wouldn't seem to be a risk, more a certainty. Except, somehow, it all seems to work. Incredibly – and against all natural laws you might think – Wolverine remains compelling enough, and intriguing enough, to carry just about any number of stories.

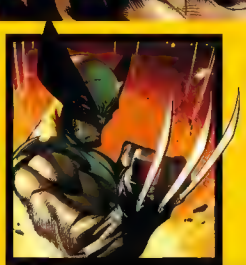
And it's not like they even have to be particularly good. Wolverine's own book has rarely risen beyond the ho hum, too often he continues to play the cartoon angry outsider in team situations, and most of the near-endless list of Wolverine graphic novels, miniseries and special editions fall broadly into the nice art/boring story category.

Doesn't matter. Even if the execution isn't always all that, the potential continues to sizzle. You can put Wolverine into a war story or a spy tale, a romance or a horror, a sci-fi romp or a medieval world, a slice of gritty kitchen-sink realism or an outrageous fantasy and he still works – and works perfectly.

You simply can't break him – and it's got nothing to do with his bones. He was just built too strong for that.

Wolverine will always – we suspect, be 'the fourth most important superhero', forever stuck behind Clark, Bruce and Peter in the public eye. But he's absolutely the most versatile of the bunch. (More than Batman, even.) You can do *anything* with him.

And crucially – unlike with those other guys – it still feels like the best storylines are yet to come. CH!



The ongoing adventures of Wolverine can be enjoyed well, just about everywhere.

Rise of the Killer Heroes

VIOLENCE IS GOLDEN

Once upon a time, superheroes didn't kill. But then the '70s came along, with Frank and Logan, and neither was much of a rule-follower at heart... **By Matt Bielby**

Death has always been big in the comics, of course – what would Clark or Bruce or Peter have been without absent parent figures pushing up the daisies? But there had long been written and unwritten rules of superhero tales, and one of the major ones was this: 'heroes do not kill'. (And neither do bad guys, for that matter: or, at least, not that often, and not 'on camera'.) This made for some awkward moments – how to justify Nick Fury's Bond like love of guns? Or Captain America's insistence on fighting World War 2 unarmed? – but it worked, kinda. We knew the commandments.

And then along came the '70s, that paranoid, violent decade, and the street-level grit of contemporary movies started to bleed into comics. Over at DC, the Spectre – not exactly a superhero, but he looked like one – was becoming more perverted and ruthless with every new Michael Fleisher story. This hotshot young writer lasted only 10 issues, from 1974-75, but they caused quite a stir, Fleisher getting his ghostly hero to revel in increasingly brutal (if bloodless) magical punishment right out of EC horror stories. (A favourite trick: turn the evil-doer into an inanimate object, then smash it to bits – a melting candle was a good one.)

Associate editor Joe Orlando had been mugged, apparently, and was pushing for a relentless, merciless superhero – and soon the Comics Code, recently made more permissive but only to a point, was being pushed and prodded in similarly tireless fashion.

Meanwhile, over at Marvel, something similar was happening. There, another young writer – Gerry Conway – was finding he got the most mileage out of all the big-name strips he'd inherited from Stan and Roy (*Fantastic Four*, *Spider-Man*) when he upped the bloodletting. Thus poor old Gwen took her fateful swan dive off the Brooklyn Bridge – and his new *Spider-Man* villain for 1974 was taking fandom by storm.

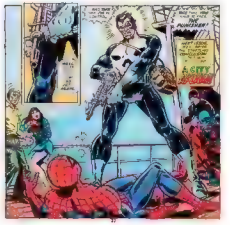
It didn't hurt that this guy boasted a killer John Romita visual, all fascist black and jackboots, capped with a mammoth death's head logo, he was called the Punisher, and he opened the floodgates. By year's end Marvel would have introduced another violent hero, this one small, ballsy and beclawed, and comics would never be the same again.

VENGEANCE IS MINE

Frank Castle was an ex-Marine, out on a revenge-spree after his wife and child are needlessly murdered by mobsters. This basic, primal retaliation theme chimed brilliantly with the vague atmosphere of paranoid, resentful fear that typified city living at the time. Castle heavily reflected *Dirty Harry*, *Death Wish* and the contemporary trend in supermarket paperbacks, not least *The Executioner* series, from which the entire concept was pretty much half-inched.

The Punisher, as Castle now named himself, was a return to the blood-soaked morality of old pulp heroes like the Shadow, something not seen in the comics since Batman had briefly used guns in his early days. Back then, Bob Kane and Bill Finger had found themselves hauled over the coals for it, and Batman's implicit vigilantism, and violence, had been played down ever since.

All of DC's – and, in time – Marvel's, comics had followed suit, with a vow not to kill coming as part of the package, it seemed, with a commitment to masked justice.



But because Peter Parker was a *particularly* moral character, the Punisher made a perfect villain for him, in the age-old 'dark mirror' tradition. The Punisher doesn't wear a mask, doesn't care about being identified, doesn't worry much about the causes of crime or consider helping misguided wrongdoers, as Peter so often does. He just thinks the only good criminal is a dead criminal. It made him a villain – at the time.

Is the Punisher insane? Conway certainly hinted that he was; one early storyline had him shooting at litterbugs and the like. But he was way more interesting when we weren't quite sure. He certainly represented a potent expression of the anger and helplessness felt by many young American men at the time.

Though an immediate hit, the Punisher took an age to get his own comic book – no superpowers; too violent to work effectively under the Comic Code – but he pointed the way forward. Batman still didn't kill, but his stories were getting more street level and nasty by the year; hell, with people like Neal Adams on board, even a fantasy character such as Green Lantern was wallowing in grit and 'reality' now. And the Punisher had shown the way.

And he'd done something else too: showed that a workable strategy for introducing a »

new character with clear star potential would be to bring him on as the *bad guy*, allowing for violent confrontation with other star characters the minute you saw him. (Yes, Marvel had tried the trick before, with the Inhumans or Black Panther in *Fantastic Four*, say, or Hercules in *Thor*, but none of those remained wrong 'uns for long. The Punisher, however, threatened to be in it for the long haul.)

Frank Castle had first appeared in February 1974, and later that year Marvel would try it again. same deal, but toned down – or, at least, made potentially more sympathetic. Instead of guns, this guy – created with an eye to the growing Canadian readership – would use knives, or (more specifically) claws; instead of the cold, poker faced murders of the Punisher, this fella would be vicious, angry and feral (Roy Thomas and co knew how snarling, aggressive anguish sold comics – so why not create a character where this is *built in*, not a dark place into which you have to drag an otherwise well-adjusted soul?)

OPPOSITES ATTRACT

As the Punisher was to Spider-Man, so Wolverine would be to the hero he was put up against, the Hulk. This was another character who worked, first and foremost, as a dark mirror: not big, but small; not dumb, but cunning; not an outcast, but an establishment government agent. Most importantly: not essentially gentle, only driven to child-like tantrums when provoked, but constantly seething with rage, fighting it back in order to function at all.

And, like the Punisher, he had another winning John Romita costume – yellow and blue, a punchy but little used colour combo in comics. It had that weird little mask, with its swept up 'ears' and (initially, at least) painted-on whiskers, and those whacking great claws, attached – as we thought – to his gloves. Just like Punisher's armoury, the implication was utterly clear: unlike Daredevil's billy club or even Thor's hammer, these could have no purpose but to kill.

Perhaps because his first home was *Hulk*, not *Spider-Man* – or maybe because his first storyline was packed with hairy monsters and Dennis Wheatley occult mumbo-jumbo, not plucked-from-the-headlines street killings – Wolverine wasn't the immediate success that the Punisher had been. But Roy Thomas and writer Len Wein thought they were onto something nevertheless.

Indeed, soon Wolverine would be drafted into the relaunched *X-Men*, spending a couple of years there as a bit of a comedy character – always running into danger hot headed, getting his arse handed to him on a plate – before exploding to the fore with the arrival of artist John Byrne on the strip. Byrne loved him as a fellow Canuck, and saw him as a necessary testosterone counterbalance to all the *X-Men*'s powerful girls. By the end of the '70s he was the hottest character in comics, and 10 years later one of the most famous and popular too.

(By this time, too, the Punisher was finally established in his own books, and now the two could feed each other to some degree: Punisher fans would be attracted to Wolverine in the *X Men*, and from there into all the colourful soap opera fun of mainstream Marvel, Wolverine fans looking for richer, redder meat now had somewhere to go too.)

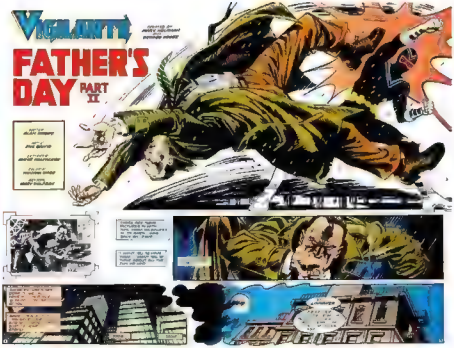
SHOCK AND AWE

In other corners of Marvel, violent heroes were also making inroads: Frank Miller had pounced upon the idea of Japanese ninjas (stolen, most likely, from Walt Simonson's *Manhunter*, also 1974) for his take on Daredevil, and specifically with Elektra – the ultimate 'old girlfriend gone bad' embodiment of the sex-equals death equation.

This Daredevil was suddenly more Batman than Batman had ever been – the noir-tinged, low powered hero battling organised crime and personal tragedy – and his fights (especially those with assassin Bullseye) became astonishing violent ballets high above the city streets. Elektra's signature weapon was the sai – a long Japanese dagger, with two large side prongs – and soon these were being punched straight through torsos (though, in a stylistic flourish, rarely shirts, making the maternal tent outwards obscenely where the blade exited flesh) in beautiful, horrific profile shots. She, too, would soon become a supervisor – and a heroine, of sorts.

Key Marvel creators of the '70s had been gently leftish types, hippies at heart – but now a new hand was forming, more macho and conservative and reflecting the new post-Reagan mainstream: the gun collector Larry Hama, keen to get Vietnam stories going at Marvel; Carl Potts, pushing for a Punisher ongoing series and coming up with a sci-fi version of the French Foreign Legion for

Vigilante: the look was Punisher-goes-skiing.



Epic; Miller himself, seemingly more right wing and hard-edged with every new storyline. The rise of the direct market (comic shops, now newsstands) had encouraged comics aimed directly at the hardcore fans, but had also allowed a level of violence to creep in that appealed to a much wider, less geeky audience.

And in Wolverine – by 1982 allowed his own miniseries, by Chris Claremont and Frank Miller, neither doing their best work but boosting the character massively – they had their superstar.

And where was DC in all this? Not as many, not as quickly, but they had their violent heroes too. Marv Wolfman had come up with a vaguely interesting hitman-with-a-conscience villain for the *New Teen Titans* in the early '80s, and he'd soon gain a following and, eventually, his own book; unfortunately, *Deathstroke the Terminator* was a misfire on virtually every level. Soon after, however, Wolfman would offer up an even closer Punisher analog – this one called, bluntly, Vigilante – again for *Titans*. A simpler concept, this one more swiftly and successfully earned his own ongoing series. By 1983, the year *Vigilante* debuted, Eagle and (later) Quality were reprinting *Judge Dredd* strips from *2000 AD* for the American market, and the grim, Lawgiver happy future cop soon gained a cult following. Frank Miller had rocked up at DC by now too, of course, and his new series there, *Ronin*, would baffle and amaze. Slick, expensive and style-conscious, it polarized fans – but few weren't shocked by the levels of violence. One spread in particular, with both an attacker's arms chopped off in one slice by our samurai hero, stopped readers in their tracks.

BLOOD WORK

And then there were the independents, the new breed of American publishers available only through the comic shops, offering science fiction and P.I. heroes where the violence wasn't the point, just a given: *Ion Sable*, *Freelance* and *American Flagg!*, space pirate *Grimjack* and a black-and-white Frank Miller parody-cum-tribute that nobody expected to do well, but just sold and sold.

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles looked like a kids' strip – except for the sai and katana used by these 'heroes in a half shell' – and, indeed, soon became a series of children's cartoons. Suddenly kung fu weapons, so recently very controversial, were little kid fodder – and it was the comics that had done it.

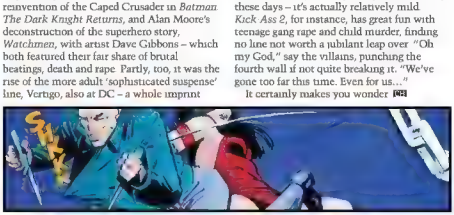
But though it was Marvel that had started the new trend for killer heroes, it was DC that would make it the new norm. Part of this came from the success of the two most important projects of the '80s – Miller's reinvention of the Caped Crusader in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, and Alan Moore's deconstruction of the superhero story, *Watchmen*, with artist Dave Gibbons – which both featured their fair share of brutal beatings, death and rape. Partly, too, it was the rise of the more adult 'sophisticated suspense' line, Vertigo, also at DC – a whole imprint bounced out of the work of Moore again, this time his turn on *Swamp Thing*. Literate fans in their twenties were pressing to see comics become more sophisticated and serious and, in the wake of *Dark Knight* and *Watchmen*, the hipper quarters of the mass media had started to agree. Perhaps inevitably, what worked in the 'adults only' realm of Vertigo soon spread into the world of superheroes too.

Mike Grell, of *Sable*, reinvented Green Arrow in *The Longbow Hunters*; Tim Truman of *Grimjack* was hired to do a darker, nastier version of *Hawkman*. At its worst this was all just grim reductionism; at its cleverest (as with Lobo, the amoral, beer drinking space mercenary) it was a case of having your cake and eating it – here was a strip that could satirize the new, cynical violence of the comics, while dishing it out too.

Fast forward to today, and things are rather different. Certainly, the levels of nastiness that Wolverine once represented – even the Punisher – now seem rather soft, even twee. In a mainstream comic like Marvel's *New Avengers*, the Sentry can rip an opponent like Carnage in half, gloop everywhere; later he'd do the same – but in even bloodier fashion – to the Greek god, Ares.

This may seem crazy extreme by traditional comic standards, but – compared to some of the other stuff you can pick up in comic shops these days – it's actually relatively mild. *Kick Ass 2*, for instance, has great fun with teenage gang rape and child murder, finding no line not worth a jubilant leap over. "Oh my God," say the villains, punching the fourth wall if not quite breaking it. "We've gone too far this time. Even for us..."

It certainly makes you wonder.



DREDD BLOODED

Thirty-five years of comic history. One loathed movie adaptation. A 'small' budget. And that codpiece. In the face of all this, how *did* they bring such a full-on, hyper-violent version of *Judge Dredd* back to the big screen?

While American big-hitters such as Batman and Superman have enjoyed several cinematic reboots, there seemed no coming back for Judge Dredd from his one mass-market outing, the 1995 Danny Cannon-directed farrago that boasted Rico, Hershey, Mean Machine Angel – even an out-of-place Hammerstein! – and wasted them all. (Okay, we exaggerate: some people are quite fond of it. Some people are also quite fond of *Krull*.)

Pairing a drawling, pre-comeback Sylvester Stallone with ill-advised comedy relief in the shape of Rob Schneider was, however, perhaps that movie's fatal flaw. Despite good work in many areas (the production design was epic, for one) this big budget mishmash consigned Britain's greatest comic book export to the realm of minor camp; decent enough late-night Freeview fare, maybe, but folks were hardly clamouring for a sequel. Enter screenwriter Alex Garland, producer Andrew MacDonald and director Pete Travis: two big names and one rising star. Both Garland and MacDonald are fans of the comics, and decided that the lawman of the future deserved another chance – and that they were just the guys to do it.

Would it be a hit? Few seemed convinced at first, but after several years – and little change from $45 million – the resulting film, punchily titled *Dredd* and boasting a no-compromise American R-rating, not only set this year's Comic-Con International at San Diego alight, but has turned a new take on *2000 AD*'s biggest character into one of the most eagerly-awaited comic book movies of the year. Not bad, considering it's been an absolutely killer 12 months for these things – *The Avengers*/*Avengers Assemble*, a new *Spider-Man*, *The Dark Knight Rises* – and that *Dredd* made do with

Dredd's an unlimited guest at this block party.

Headley as cop-killer Ma-Ma.

a budget that would struggle to cover those productions' catering costs.

Filmed in South Africa with a combination of British and Indian money, and starring a New Zealander and a relative unknown, *Dredd* – it's sometimes called *Dredd 3D* – is very much a gritty, hard-edged interpretation of the long-running series. Karl Urban takes the helm as the gruff, sardonic lawman who is judge, jury and executioner all rolled into one, while Olivia Thirlby is the borderline-fail rookie Judge Cassandra Anderson, who Dredd must assess. Taking the case of a triple homicide in one of the city's mega-blocks – one of the vast, vertical slums that dot this near-future landscape, and are breeding grounds for crime – Dredd and Anderson find themselves trapped inside by Lena Headey's ruthless and psychotic mob leader, Ma-Ma. Soon they're fighting for their lives.

“Nasty, violent and dark... it brings Dredd right back to his dystopian roots”

Law and disorder

All the traditional elements of Dredd's world are here, then – the Lawgiver gun, with its multi-choice bullets; the brutish Lawmaster bikes; the huge city-blocks; even fatties and their belly wheels. But *Dredd* is fundamentally different to what has gone before. Nasty, violent and dark, it brushes aside the gold codpieces and cheesy dialogue of Stallone's film and brings Dredd right back to his dystopian roots.

In a ballsy move, US distributors Lionsgate chose to screen the movie in full – and a full two months before release – during the opening night of Comic-Con to an audience of press and lucky fans. The gamble seems to have paid off, with reviews praising the film's simple blend of razor-sharp plot and beautifully shot violence.

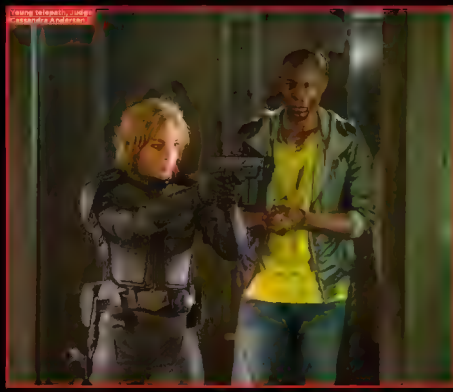
The project has come a long way, then, since Garland and McDonald first decided they wanted to bring Joe Dredd back from Hollywood's scrapheap. But how did they start talking about the project in the first place?

“Andrew and I were in post-production on *Sunshine*, and pre-production on *28 Weeks Later*,” says Garland. “He said he'd heard that we'd be able to get the movie rights for Dredd and I jumped at the chance.

“In some respects the first *Judge Dredd* was actually a plus, because if it had been a different kind of movie we wouldn't have had the resources to get the rights. Because of the first film, frankly, the license wasn't as expensive or valuable as it might have been.”

After getting the go-ahead to make the film from *2000 AD*'s owners, Rebellion, the first thing Garland did was go right to the source. The central block in the film, Peach Trees, is named after the restaurant where he and MacDonald met *Dredd* co-creator (and main writer) John Wagner for the first time. Wagner's advice, gleaned from handling *Dredd* for so long, had a big impact on the script-writing process – far from the case with many of Hollywood's comic properties.

But what, we wonder, was the problem with the Stallone film in their eyes? Too



Fan Service

How Dredd's online fanbase helped influence the film, and even made its way on-screen...

Although Dredd's comic book fanbase is much smaller than that of any major US superhero, it's no less active or vehement. As a *Judge Dredd* reader from childhood – his first 'Prog', or issue, was during the early mega-story 'The Day The Law Died' – Alex Garland was keen to keep the true fans onboard, and admits their reactions were always 'very important' to him.

"The truth is, I started regularly reading – but not posting on! – the *2000 AD* online forum before the film was set up, in order to use it as a kind of barometer. During filming and post-production it was also useful because it would tell me what was leaking. But I also got to know these names that kept cropping up, so I'd get an idea of where they were coming from and what their concerns were. And I'm not kidding, it would help keep me focused on what mattered and what didn't. When this film was really a struggle – and it was – that website would really centre me. So I used to read it a fuck of a lot, and I still do."

Indeed, so useful was it that throughout the film very subtle references to certain fans – people Garland felt were particularly supportive of the production – crop up: a billboard here, a news report title there. "At one point in post-production I started feeding names into scenes," Garland says. "I wanted it to stand as a testament to that group of people."

much overt comedy? "When I first read *Dredd*," Garland says, "I was 10 or 11, and I didn't read it as comedy at all. There was a lot of satire that I could see when I was older, but I just didn't pick up on it at first.

"What I saw was this incredibly tough cop in this crazy dangerous world, and I was hypnotised and drawn into that. There was another mode of Dredd, too, which was a melancholic, reflective, bruised older guy, with the granite starting to crumble. I thought there was a wealth of seriousness there that wasn't camp and was easy to access – but that wasn't mine, it was already there. That was Wagner."

URBAN LOCKED

Known for roles in *The Lord Of The Rings*, the *Bourne* franchise, and – perhaps most of all – his stellar performance as 'Bones' McCoy in the recent *Star Trek* reboot, Karl Urban is already something of a geek icon. Also a *Dredd* fan, the Kiwi grew up reading reprints in his home town of Wellington and, when he heard that a new version was in the pipeline, became determined to get involved.

"My agent initially called me up," he says, "and asked if I'd be interested in doing a *Judge Dredd* movie, and I said, 'Hell yeah, let me read the script.'"

Urban also found that one of the pleasures of doing the film was being forced to read *Dredd* comics for research, only to discover a wealth of material he'd missed in recent years.

"You've got 'Origins', the Dead Man's walk to 'Necropolis', 'America', those sorts of things," he says, "and they were really great stories to find. There's also a wonderful maturity that happens with Wagner's writing as the stories go on, where this seed of doubt is implanted in the character. I thought that was just fascinating. Dredd's story starts off where he's just this guy who's doing his job, but then, maybe 20 years later, he begins to question things. It's a wonderful complexity to build into this character, and I wanted to try and plant the seeds for it in this movie, too – that weariness."

After three and a half decades – and hundreds of storylines – knowing where to begin to tell Judge Dredd's story was Garland's first major challenge.

"I began by writing about Judge Death," Garland says, "but realised, after several drafts, that this wouldn't work as a first movie, because it presupposes too much about Dredd and his world.

"You can't launch into this strange, existential story about this supernatural figure, who himself is a riff on Judge Dredd, you kind of need to have established Judge Dredd in order to do a riff on him.

"So I ditched that idea, and then started working on a version which had its roots in 'America', the story about democratic insurgency within Mega-City One. I was fascinated with the idea of pro-democracy terrorists – and still am. It didn't have a supernatural angle, but you still had the same problem – you need to have established Dredd already before you get into this stuff.

"Third time around I realised I had to zero-down to Dredd and the world in which he operates, and if we're then lucky enough to make sequels I would do pro-democracy terrorists second – and then bring in this weird threat in the form of Judge Death third. But, to be clear, that's a completely fanciful

proposition: we need to generate such a lot of money to make that a reality that it is, at best, a very long way off."

For Karl Urban, too, establishing the reality of this world was paramount.

"When I read the script," he says, "it became obvious that what we were trying to do was completely different. Tonally, you couldn't get more different. I think that our film is a lot more… well, I don't know how to describe it, really. But I will say this: going into this movie, I watched the Stallone version to see what worked and what didn't. The way I wanted to approach this was not to have him as a posturing, bellowing character that was grounded in ego; to me, that wasn't the Dredd I knew. It was far more interesting to show this inner rage, and a man struggling to contain it rather than letting it all explode. I wanted to find the humanity within Dredd, because he *is* just a man; he's not a superhero, he has no superhero power. It's his heroism that makes him so iconic: he's the guy always walking into the building when everyone else is running out. He does the things most people wouldn't dare to do in real life."

Making Dredd

Garland – an acclaimed novelist, as well as the man behind the scripts for *The Beach*, *28 Days Later* and *Sunshine* – is adamant that there are character fundamentals that the first movie got just plain wrong.

As well as sporting a bizarre, Versace codpiece, Stallone ditched the helmet – and most of his uniform – as quickly as he could, making the first question on many a fan's lips the minute this project was announced: 'Will Urban remove the helmet?'

No, is the obvious – and correct – answer. After all, the hero is so wedded to his role he *never* does so in the comics.

"That wasn't a fight, it was a given," says Garland. "As it happens, Rebellion put that in the contract – but they didn't need to, as we wouldn't have done it anyway."

Urban too, was relieved to discover that Dredd kept the helmet on. "Everyone working on this knew how important it was that he did so; indeed, I wouldn't have done the movie had he not kept it on the entire time! Everyone was on the same page about that."

Not that acting-without-eyes makes things particularly easy for the film's lead, of course.

"The character oscillates from being a protector to being incredibly violent to having this wry, sardonic humour to displaying compassion at times," Urban says. "There are a lot of aspects to him. The challenge for me, then, was to make all of that happen from behind the helmet. There's a weariness as well, which I thought was really important."

Many comic writers describe Dredd as one of the most difficult characters to write, thanks to his near monosyllabic brevity and stony continence. But Garland disagrees.

"Nah, Dredd really is easy," he says. "And it's not anything innately about him, but – and this is going to sound like lip-service to the previous writers of *Dredd*, but it's not – he's such a well-defined character that if you write a line that doesn't sound like it'd come out of his mouth, it sticks out like a sore thumb.

"I'd write the scripts and send them to John, and he'd sit down with me and Andrew, and say, 'Dredd has used too many words to say this, reduce it'. There was one point where I had Dredd stabbing someone, and John really didn't like the idea of that. I say it was easy; it *felt* easy, but if I got something wrong John would pick up on it and change it. And then Karl would do the same thing, because he had to speak the words – and sometimes he'd find a way to reduce it still further."

Another Dimension

Filmed in 3D – rather than having the stereoscopic process added in post-production – the film makes full use of the technique thanks to scenes involving Slo-Mo, a drug controlled by Ma-Ma's gang. Slowing time down to a fraction and heightening perception, *Dredd 3D*'s audience are treated to almost psychedelic slow-motion scenes that also happen to contain some of the most beautiful violence you'll ever see. But this is no cheap trick – the drug is woven into the film's plot, and Garland is keen to highlight the stunning work of cinematographer Anthony Dod Mantle, a real unsung hero of the production.

"It's impossible for me to talk about this film without thinking of Anthony," he says. "This is a guy who's a profoundly talented artist, and he'd bring something to the set every day that was really important

AIN'T NO PITY IN THE MEGA-CITY

Why this *Dredd* looks way more *Robocop* than you might expect, and rather less like *The Fifth Element*...

...book or Dredd's Mega-City One is radically different from Boyle's neon nightmare of the first *Judge Dredd* film, with the closely-packed *Blade Runner*-inspired skyscrapers in favour of a more ground-level, dystopian vision of a city on the edge. While from afar, the spaces between the giant mega-blocks may seem disappointingly wide to comic book fans, on closer inspection those spaces are filled with modern-sized skyscrapers, themselves surrounded by ancient shanty towns. Rather then a beacon of future civilisation, it gives visual expression to the idea that Garland and Donald's Mega-City One is a crumbling voyage into a devastated world.

...also allows the film then to look completely different to the ...neatly plotting geological ...between the two of the ...unfamiliar with the two are numerous, and central to the visual niche.

...ell, on first exposure to this new look some fans, expecting ...ridoscopic future filled with hover cars and aliens, cried foul. Garland says the city's look was rooted in the quite mundane idea of bringing a future metropolis to life. "In the very ...

...were our budget was going to be, we knew it would be more than $20 million and less than $30 million. Because of that we realised from the start that there were all sorts of elements of Mega-City One that weren't going to be in the film: flying cars and aliens."

Play it real, in other words...?

"In that first conversation I had with Alex [Garland], the approach was going to be 'we'll shoot it in Glasgow' – we had some really big tower blocks and make them even bigger [on-screen], but we'll shoot it in real stairwells. In some sense, I see the finished film – although we ended up shooting in Johannesburg and Cape Town – that principle is still there: it's our world writ large, rather than that *other* version of Mega-City One, which is more fantastical than realistic, as in *The Fifth Element*.

"When we started *Dredd*, we'd done *28 Days Later* and *Sunshine*, and were in pre-production for *Ms Pettigrew Lives*, and all of those you take a genre story but you play it straight and you play it real. There might be crazy or surreal things that happen within that, but the backbone is more like *Dirty Harry* than anything.

So partly it's budget...?

...

and crucial. Working with Anthony was a pleasure, a really deep pleasure."

But that doesn't mean filming was a breeze. Indeed, Garland describes it as the most difficult film he's ever worked on.

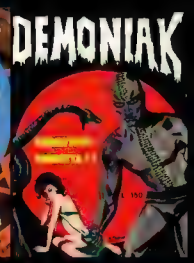
"There were fights," he admits. "The whole film, from start to finish, was one long fight. But rather than fundamental disagreements, they were much more to do with, 'How do we achieve this' and 'How can we possibly make this happen?'. The budget that gets floated around is misleading – we had very few resources, and what we had were considerably less as soon as the 3D came along. It was just a challenge. You ask about obstacles – I'm swamped by them, it was like a tsunami as they came flooding back."

Were you ever worried the damn thing would never get completed, then?

"At times it was very, very grim – but it was also gratifying. It's like the pleasure people can get if they like mountain climbing – you keep thinking, 'Why the fuck am I doing this?', and then you reach the top and you think, 'That's why!' There's a kind of Calvinist pleasure to be had there."

***Dredd* opens in the UK on 7 September.**

Fumetti Neri
DIABOLIK AND THE



ITALIAN CRIME CONNECTION

The same year that Marvel launched Spider-Man, Italy fell in love with a very different masked 'hero'...

By Paul Gravett

Fifty years ago this year, one revolution in comic books was already gaining momentum: at the Marvel Comics offices in New York City, Stan Lee and Steve Ditko's Spider-Man was the first solo teenage superhero in his costume and secret identity. Elsewhere in 1963, another decisive, disturbing precursor to consumed [illegible] was being triggered. At a small publishing house called Astorina in Milan, Italy, the enterprising Angelo and Luciana Zanchi noticed that the genre was ripe for change and that a highly darkened mask lead in fresh [illegible]

Comic strip creator Roberto Raviola, a young [illegible] in the name of an artist William Vance, an admirer of [illegible] swaggering gunsmoke, the last two centuries [illegible] to worry about, and no qualms about [illegible] the yellow [illegible] and, if necessary, [illegible] with the deadly blade. He was a modern's [illegible] figure, garbed head-to-toe in a skintight, jet-black [illegible] except for the [illegible] eyebrows and piercing eyes.

[illegible] Hollywood actor, Rondo Hatton, [illegible] acromegaly, [illegible] Universal horror [illegible] Diabolik, [illegible] Hatton's [illegible] Ringo, [illegible] December 1963, the first [illegible] Diabolik [illegible] Ginko [illegible] Clerville [illegible] Diabolik [illegible] Eva Kant [illegible] Inspector Ginko [illegible] the introduction to the first [illegible] 1963, Diabolik was described thus: "a man of

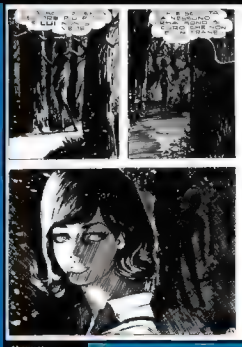
powers seem supernatural, in fact Diabolik is the man of a thousand disguises. With his special mask of plastic of his own invention, he can transform the features of his face, with tinted contact lenses he can change the colour of his eyes, and with other infinite tricks he can modify his athletic physique into a body that is old, sagging, fat or ruddy. With these remarkable transformations he can camouflage himself as he pleases and evade his adversaries no matter how difficult or desperate the situation. Only one man will absolutely not surrender to Diabolik: Inspector Ginko, head of the Homicide Squad, who has hunted this phantom criminal worldwide for years. In this almost inhuman struggle terrible events conspire together through the evil cunning of Diabolik and the sharp genius of Ginko."

Long before *Diabolik*, super criminals had starred in popular prose fiction going back at least to French characters like gentleman burglar Arsène Lupin by Maurice Leblanc in 1905, hooded Romany gangster Zigomar by Léon Sazie in 1910, and Parisian 'genius of evil' Fantômas by Marcel Allain and Pierre Souvestre in 1911. Before them there was also the British 'amateur cracksman' and master of disguise, Raffles, created in 1898 by EW Horning, brother-in-law of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

Most of these rogues had later appeared in comic strip versions – *Fantômas* enjoying a long run in Mexico. While drawing on these fiendish forerunners, Diabolik stands as a thoroughly modern comic creation of the Swinging '60s, driving the latest black Jaguar E-Type, and teaming up from his third issue with a very capable blonde partner – in crime and in bed – called Eva Kant, clearly modelled on Jane Fonda.

As for his origins, these would not begin to be disclosed until much later, with a cult story in the fifth of the fortnightly issues published in 1968.

Imprisoned with his nemesis Ginko, Diabolik finally exclaims: "I don't know who I am!" It is revealed that a drumelord named King took him under his wing as a shipwrecked orphan, and trained him to be the successor to his sudden island empire. The protege rebels by murdering and robbing King, and taking on his appearance to quit the island and destroy his organisation. Nameless, he calls himself after a pet black panther to which his mentor had compared him. Diabolik.



Above: How very '60s: the girl has her dead-eyed cool even before Diabolik strikes.

Below: The eyes have it with *Diabolik*: it's the rare page that's not built around them.

FROM A MONEYED middle-class family, Angela and Luciana Giussani were part of the Milanese jet-set. As shrewd businesswomen, they spotted a lucrative gap in Italy's booming newsstand market for novels in comics form, small enough to hide in your pocket, long enough to last your train journey to or from work.

They based their new product on the traditional compact paperback format of a 'giallo' or yellow, the Italian term for a crime story, using the format's luridly illustrated card covers and 128 black-and-white pages inside, outting two panels per page. With the logo in ragged red brushstrokes, as if scrawled in blood, *Diabolik* was initially billed as 'the comic for thrills' when from late 1965 as the 'giallo in comics', offering a 'complete novel for adults' for only 150 lire.

Perhaps wisely, the sisters signed their stories as "A and L Giussani", out of fear that the public would not buy such a comic written by two women. *Diabolik* rapidly became a hit, shifting from quarterly to monthly, then fortnightly from January 1965.

Why did *Diabolik* prove so popular? Partly, it suited the mood of the times. Since the late '50s, Italians had been rocked by rapid financial, industrial and social changes. An economic miracle was encouraging thousands to abandon agriculture and work in factories and offices. Mass migration to northern cities like Milan resulted in a rise in literacy, disposable income, and the demand for cut-price reading matter. To cater to this expanding readership, Italy developed a massive and diversified periodical market, distributed, until 1999, solely by a powerful union via a phenomenal 37,000 newsstands.

Diabolik also tapped into many people's deepest, most selfish fantasies. As Astorina's current director, Mario Gomboli, explained in *That's Fumetti* in 1998, "[Diabolik] did not think twice before taking what he wanted, not before doing what he had set his mind on doing. This was the very incarnation of the unconfessed aspirations of much of the human race."

The series also reflected growing unease about consumer society capitalist greed and political corruption, by asking "Who are the real villains?" Gomboli states that *Diabolik*'s readers "realised that most of the victims of his ruthless dagger, even though they wore a suit and tie and not Diabolik's black, hooded sweatsuit, were even greater villains than he was: corrupt politicians, drug-pushers, usurers, tycoons, who would stop at nothing to amass ever greater wealth."

Diabolik pushed against decades of stifling censorship and the moralistic

"*Diabolik* tapped into many people's deepest, most selfish fantasies"

repression of the Catholic church, and helped pave the way for greater liberalism in the decade. In 1962 Italian publishers of children's comics had introduced the 'Garanzia Morale' or moral guarantee, as a seal of approval similar to America's Comics Code Authority. It was designed to impose a certain political correctness, and allay teachers' and parents' anxieties. To sidestep this, *Diabolik* declared 'for adults' on its covers, a neat trick that was soon followed by a flood of other '*fumetti neri*', or black comics, which copied its format, formula and arresting one-word name, often using that criminalising letter 'K', and mixing up the crime with sexual and horror elements.

Below: The 1968 movie, *Danger: Diabolik*. John Phillip Law, blue eyes flashing.

THE EARLIEST OF the *Diabolik* copies, in June 1964, was *Fantax*, who worked as detective John Marquall within the law, while secretly hunting down criminals in a skeleton costume. To avoid confusion with the original, *Fantax*, created in 1946, the series changed its name to *Fantaxmen* in 1965 and ended in August 1967.

Two superior *fumetti neri* were *Kriminal* and *Satanik*, created in August and December 1964 by Max Bunker and Magnus, pen-names of Luciano Secchi and Roberto Raviola, for Milan publisher Andrea Corno. Kriminal had grown up as Anthony Logan in a reformatory and, after taking revenge against the man who drove his father to suicide, warps into a sadistic killer dressed in a full-body black-and-yellow skeleton costume. Satanik, meanwhile, started life as the disfigured Marny Bannister, shunned even by her own family, who wreaks revenge when she transforms herself into a beautiful, heartless killer – and an unstoppable symbol of women's sexual power. Commercial hits, both titles lasted until 1974, Satanik drowning in her 231st issue. Remarkably, Kriminal had appeared weekly for most of his 419 issues.

Another successful spin-off from *Diabolik*, published by Angela Giussani's husband, Gino Sansoni, was *Zakimort* (1965-72, 91 issues). Black-haired Fedra Gallant is the rich and charming young heiress of her assassinated criminal father. Living a double life, she dons a black leotard and blonde wig to eradicate his killers and all criminals without mercy, assisted by strongman Leo and marksman Teddy. Little does Fedra's boyfriend, police lieutenant Norton realise that his elusive enemy, Zakimort is the woman he loves.

The *fumetti neri* explosion threw up a horde of other bizarre protagonists. *Mister-X* (53 issues, 1964-8) was a super-fiend inspired by *Fantômas*, while *Sadik* (62 issues, 1965-7) was as ruthless as the Punisher in his black suit, which cleverly became impenetrable thanks to a regenerative bath.

Weirdly misspelled with a 'j', perhaps to mimic *Diabolik*'s 'k', *Infernal* (28 issues, 1965-7) was the world's 'public enemy number one' whose mask enables him to change his face, while malevolent

Mastermind Genius began in 1966 as a photographic comic, switching in October 1968 to comic art, some of it by a young Milo Manara. *Spettrus* (50 issues, 1965-7) was the immortal ghost of scientist Marcus Emerson, whose glowing eyeballs possess other people's bodies and feed on fear.

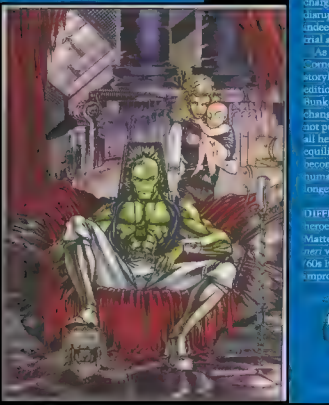
In his first incarnation, *Demonia* (30 issues, 1965-7) was another scientist, this time intent on inventing a super-race to rule the world; his brief second version in 1972 was practically a clone of *Diabolik*. *Cobrak*, *Killing*, *Masokis*, *Tenebrax*, *Terrore* and *Venus* were just a few more of this boom-and-bust craze, some never going beyond one issue.

AT THEIR BEST, these provocative Italian comics were delivering more complex 'heroes' than anything else in the '60s, but not everyone was happy. Since its third issue, *Diabolik* had been the target of a long series of official complaints and criminal charges, of which publishers Astorina were entirely acquitted. Still a press campaign across the political spectrum – from the Catholic right to the Communist left – soon spread a moral panic to suppress these provocative little publications.

One scare-mongering cover story in *La Domenica del Corriere* of April 4 1965 told how, "Milanese employee Bruno Parini, tired of not finding dinner ready because his wife spent her time reading these comics, borrowed from a friend a carnival costume like Diabolik's and, dressed like this, burst in at night on his wife. However, the sudden shock to his wife Franca was greater than expected and she had to recover in a private clinic for nervous

Above: Lovely Eva, the Grace Kelly-style ice queen with an eye for the ice.

Below: Ramerio, looking like some strange, perverted twist on the Savage Dragon, perhaps?



conditions. Now, luckily, the lady has recovered; she will not be reading any more of these comics."

A month later, a magazine claimed that a Sicilian wife had poisoned her husband, allegedly inspired by the *Fumetti neri*, especially *Diabolik*.

More seriously, the front page of the weekly *Tribuna Illustrata* of October 2 1966 showed Fantax, Satanik, Sadik, Demoniak and Kriminal (but not Diabolik) all put behind bars. The accompanying debate in its pages came ahead of a court case in Milan against the publishers, directors, printers and distributors (but not the creators) of *Kriminal*, *Sadik* and *Satanik*, on the charges of glamorising crime and disrupting all sense of shame. And, indeed, in February 1967 they lost the trial and were each heavily fined.

As a concession, publisher Andrea Corno asked Max Bunker to soften his storylines. In the special colour 100th edition of *Satanik* (November 6, 1968) Bunker refers to all the various changes, concluding that, "Satanik is not perverse. She has given free rein to all her repressions to acquire a certain equilibrium which has led her to become more mature and more human." *Fumetti neri* would no longer be quite as black.

DIFFERENT TIMES need different heroes or antiheroes. Comics historian Matteo Stefanelli believes, "*Fumetti neri* were a sort of 'dark side' of the '60s Italian 'miracle': the country was improving, but *Diabolik* revealed what was 'hidden' behind the boom: abuses, economic differences, egoism, violence. But I see no anti-authoritarian attitudes in them. Later, in the era of punk, writer Stefano Tamburini's roots were in the youth movement of 1977, libertarian, creative, linked with radical and extreme leftist stances."

By the spring of that year, after the defeat of the student occupation of the University of Bologna, many young Italians felt left out in the cold. In 1978 Tamburini founded his own underground magazine, *Cannibale*, in which he created the story of a student who, "projects his repressed rage into the mechanical hoodlum he has built himself with parts of a photocopy machine stolen from a university building". Tamburini wrote and initially, drew his irrational, absurdly violent robot *Rank Xerox* himself, with help from other cartoonists – and, appropriately, a photocopier.

And then it went mainstream. In 1980, the illustrator Tanino Liberatore brought a stunning hyperrealism to the bizarre *Rank Xerox*, and the chaotic circus of his near-future Rome, when Tamburini brought the series to the colour pages of the new, rather cool magazine, *Frigidaire*. Out-of-control, the over-muscled, pig-nosed brute became the sextoy of Lubna, a precocious Lolita, and – in one notorious scene – crushed the hand of a girl pestering him to buy her flowers.

It wasn't long before the Rank Xerox corporation objected to the association

"*Fumetti neri* were a sort of 'dark side' of the '60s Italian 'miracle'"

of their product with a character whose adventures are a concentration of violence, obscenity and foul language", so Tamburini and Liberatore eventually conceded – sort of – and renamed him 'Ranxerox'. The strip became an international sensation, translated (with some censorship) in *Heavy Metal* magazine. Tragically, further adventures and a movie adaptation came to a halt in 1986 with Tamburini's early death.

The same year brought another extraordinary new character to the pages of *Frigidaire*'s offshoot, *Tempo Supplementari*. Ramarro (or 'Lizard') is the first masochistic superhero, whose only goal is to make himself as evil as possible in the most bizarre ways. Like his reptilian namesake, whatever you break off him will grow back.

Creator Giuseppe Palumbo explains that Ramarro is "the punk son of a 'normal' family of self-righteous superheroes, who rebels against them and decides that the only 'sensible' decision when he discovers his superpowers is to use them against himself." Palumbo acknowledges his green-skinned outsider owes a lot to the anarchic DNA which *Satanik* creator Magnus' comics transmitted to him. Ramarro is also Palumbo's response to seismic changes during the late '80s and early '90s, such as the fall of the Berlin Wall, Chernobyl, and widespread Italian bribery.

In 1991, *Ramarro* was reinvented with writer Daniele Brolli for *Cyborg*, the first cyberpunk comic magazine and his universe has continued expanding in subsequent series.

Through all these changes and competitors, the original *Diabolik* has survived and is still huge in Italy, with an exhibition in Milan this November and numerous celebrity fans, such as fashion designers Dolce & Gabbana, for whom, "*Diabolik* is a legend. We've been reading it since we were young. He is a male icon: he's got a perfect body, a beautiful woman and lives in amazing hideouts. Yet he is also a robber and a thief with a penchant for diamonds. Deep down, we are all criminals like him."

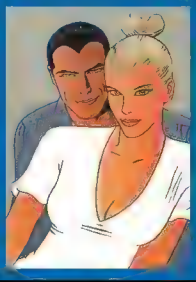
Fittingly, over the past decade *Ramarro*'s Palumbo has also become one of the *Diabolik* series' outstanding new illustrators. "To me," he says, "*Diabolik* is totally devoid of humour or irony, whereas I think irony is essential to my stories and my outlook on life. So drawing *Diabolik*, I am trying to channel all the dark and serious side of me."

WHILE MARIO Bava's 1968 movie version, *Danger: Diabolik* (perhaps the only take on the character that most English-speakers will be aware of), is admired as a Pop Art classic, Italy's greatest masked anti-hero had to wait until 1986 for two of his comics to appear in English, and only six more, in 1999, have cropped up since. The animated TV version, in 2000, proved too morally questionable for American viewers and had to be censored, though the 2009 videogame sold well enough for an *Diabolik* movie to start with an English-speaking audience. Palumbo thinks so. "For years there's been talk of a movie," he says. "If Tarantino or Besson were keen, they'd be perfect. I'd like Guy Ritchie. But I fear all three would be tempted to add irony – which, as I said, would be lethal!"

Meanwhile, the word is out that this November will see the first ever live-action Italian TV series. What better way to start another *Diabolik*-ally 50 years!

Above: Diabolik towers over the city; his crimes loved and hated by the people; a very Southern European sort of comic book 'hero' indeed.

Below: *Ranxerox*, semi-insane ultra-violent robot from a broken future.



WHO, BETTER

After endless regenerations, can Andy Diggle's dream team give us a version of *Doctor Who* that sticks? **By Stephen Jewell**

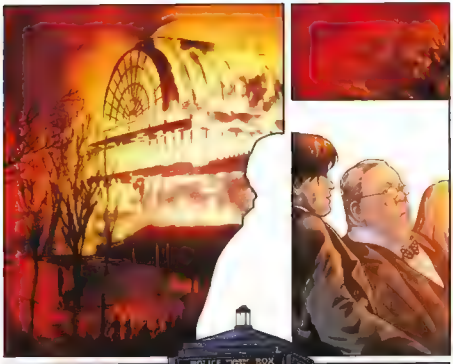
Britain's premier science fiction hero is a TV phenom first and foremost, of course, but The Doctor has quite a history in the comics too: the likes of Dave Gibbons and John Ridgway have had extensive runs on the British strips, and since 2007 the Time Lord's been a continuing presence in American comic shops too, through an assortment of IDW series and one-shots by various creators – every one of whom must surely have approached the property at least a little a-tremble at the sheer weight of the legacy they've got to live up to.

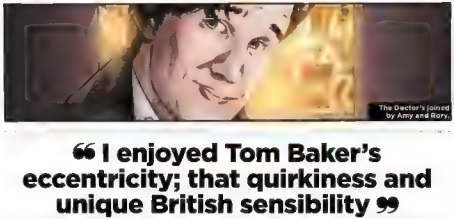
Although he forged his reputation on fast-paced action thrillers such as *The Losers* and noir tinged superhero tales starring the likes of Daredevil, Batman and Green Arrow, Andy Diggle is no exception. Now the former *2000 AD* editor has been given the plum assignment of guiding the third volume of IDW's *Doctor Who* monthly through its assorted timey-wimey twists and turns, and, as with everything Doctor-related (Diggle, not so much), gratuitous use of lethal hardware is very much *off* the agenda…

But how did he get the gig in the first place?

"It sort of happened by accident," admits Diggle, who will team up with *Fables*/*Miracleman* artist Mark Buckingham when the series returns with a new #1 next month. "I think it was probably Jamie McKelvie who made a throwaway comment on Twitter, saying he'd love to draw *Doctor Who* one day. I idly tweeted back with, 'Well, I'd love to write it!' Suddenly I got an email from Tony Lee, who was writing the comic for IDW at the time, and thought they might be looking for a new writer. So I dropped IDW Publisher Chris Ryall a line, and he was very open to the idea. I thought it would just be for a miniseries at the time, as I didn't know that they planned to relaunch it this autumn."

All images © IDW





The Doctor's joined by Amy and Rory.

Born at the start of the '70s, one of Diggle's earliest memories – as, we imagine, it is with most kids of the era - is of the concluding episode of the pivotal 1974 *Doctor Who* storyline 'Planet Of The Spiders'. It featured the final appearance of Jon Pertwee's flamboyant third Doctor, and boasted an atypical action movie-style chase sequence, taking in hovercraft, flying cars and all sorts.

"I've got a vague memory of being creeped out by watching him regenerate into Tom Baker," Diggle says, "and I've also got strong memories of 'The City Of Death' a few years later – when Julian Glover pulls his face mask off and you realise he's actually an alien! That was one of those classic hide-behind-the sofa moments."

THE DOCTOR IS IN

The young Diggle was also a big fan of the classic, recently reissued '70s Target *Doctor Who* novels

"I bought piles of them second-hand from jumble sales, and read them voraciously," he says. "In my head, the sets didn't wobble and the special effects were amazing, because it was all coming from my imagination. I had the actors from the TV show as a touchstone, so I knew what they looked like and how they delivered their lines – but *Doctor Who* was always much more impressive in my head than it ever looked on our blurry little black-and-white telly."

In the late '70s, Diggle picked up reprints of Marvel UK's *Doctor Who Weekly*, including some memorable work by the esteemed likes of John Wagner, Pat Mills, Mick McMahon and Dave Gibbons

"I was also quite partial to Steve Moore and Steve Dillon's *Absolom Daak: Dalek Killer*, which I guess owes more to Snake Plissken from *Escape From New York* than *Doctor Who*," he laughs. "As a *2000 AD* fan, that played into the blood-and-thunder type stuff I was enjoying back then."

Not that there's a great deal of call for blood-and-thunder in *Doctor Who*'s current incarnation; we're now living in a very different era, and Diggle's run will very much takes its cue from the programme's modern-day showrunners, Steven Moffat and Russell T Davies.

"I enjoyed Tom Baker's eccentricity; that quirkiness and unique British sensibility"

"*Doctor Who* has been so many different things over the decades," Diggle says. "You might get one story that was serious sci-fi, another that was Gothic horror, and then one that was largely played for laughs – while, less often, you'd get something that had a really heartfelt, character-driven quality to it. What they've done recently is blend all those disparate elements together, so that you get a bit of each in every episode. There's something for everybody!"

Apart from raising the production values, Diggle credits Russell T Davies with giving the show 'real heart' when he brought it back from cancellation in 2005

"*Doctor Who* sometimes wears it on its sleeve," he says, "but that allows it to connect with a much wider audience, rather than just being a niche sci fi show. In terms of my approach, I'm not reinventing the wheel. I very much enjoyed Tom Baker's eccentricity; that kind of quirkiness, and »

uniquely British sensibility. Obviously, Matt Smith's Doctor is not the same character, but I love his similarly mercurial, turning-on-a-dime quality.

"It's a pleasure to write dialogue for him, to be honest – but, of course, comics are a very different medium to TV. You can't rely on an actor's delivery or mannerisms, for one thing. So it's an enjoyable writing challenge, trying to capture those physical quirks in the comic; the way he'll spin on his heel or suddenly go off on a tangent."

FIREBRANDS & FOLLOWERS

Of course, a writer is only ever half of a team, and Mark Buckingham has perfectly captured the essence of Matt Smith's bravura performance in his art.

"He's really brought it to life," Diggle says. "With licensed comics, there's always a tension between allowing the artist to do his own thing and getting the likenesses right. Often you get one or the other, rarely both. So I'm lucky to have been paired with Mark, because he can do both things in spades. He's got a great sense, not just of storytelling and character, but also sci-fi design."

Meanwhile, Amy and Rory – the two incumbent companions – have provided their own challenges. "Amy's a real firebrand," says Diggle. "And it's fun to have Rory running around after her, eager to please."

With Joshua Hale Fialkov – the American writer perhaps best known for DC's *I, Vampire* series – having wrapped up his stint on the title earlier this year, Diggle will be starting with a proverbial clean slate.

"This is a new series," he says, "so I want the first issue to be a good jumping-on point for new readers – but, of course, I'm aware of what's gone before and I'm trying to be respectful to that."

He's also paying little heed to this summer's *Star Trek: The Next Generation/Doctor Who* crossover, *Assimilation Squared*. "That's a separate story, and we don't want to tie ourselves in knots, continuity-wise. It's important that *Doctor Who* should be for everyone, and I don't want people feeling like they're missing out if there's some backstory they haven't read before."

Like Russell T Davies and Steven Moffat on the television series, Diggle will act as the lead writer on the book, with others stepping in to tell their own tales between his issues, beginning with the intriguing coupling of Brandon Seifert (*Witch Doctor*) and Philip Bond (*Kill Your Boyfriend*) on #3-4.

"We're breaking the story up into smaller chunks," he says, "so it'll be mostly two-episode stories, which is a structure I really like. But there'll also be an arc thread that ties the whole thing together, though it hopefully won't be too immediately apparent. The stories should work as self contained two-parters, but if you read the whole series you'll see the connecting tissue."

Titled 'The Hypothetical Gentleman', Diggle's opening shot takes place in the long-destroyed Crystal Palace, built to house London's Great Exhibition of 1851, though before that he'll team up with Buckingham on a six-page prologue in this month's *Doctor Who Special 2012*.

"I was really happy doing a Victorian *Doctor Who* story," Diggle says, "as it's really my love letter to the old Tom Baker/Philip Hinchcliffe TV episodes such as 'The Talons of Weng-Chiang'.

"First, the Doctor, Amy and Rory go to the Crystal Palace when it's actually at Crystal Palace, some time in the '30s, then, in the first issue of the new series, they jump back yet further in time to the Crystal Palace's original location in Hyde Park. I'm tipping my hat to a lot of the places I grew up in here, as I used to spend every weekend as a kid playing in the ruins of the old Palace. There were all these legends of lost railway tunnels, and conspiracy theories about what caused it to burn down, so it was fun to throw the Doctor into the middle of all that."

Then, beginning in #5, Diggle's next storyline couldn't be more different.

"It's set on a luxury starliner in the far future," he says. "People know that I like a good caper, so this is a caper in space. It'll feature a character from the TV series, who hasn't been announced yet so I can't say who it is – but hopefully it'll be a nice surprise."

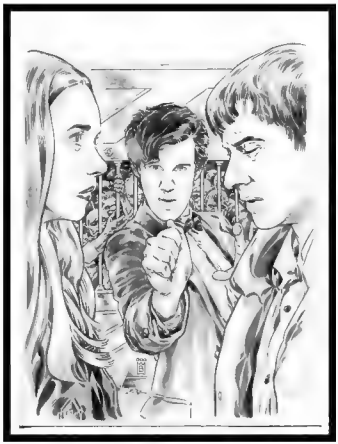
Something else Diggle can't confirm: when (and if) he'll get to write Jenna-Louise Coleman's as-yet-unnamed new companion, who will make her debut in this year's Christmas TV special.

"It's all down to the BBC," he says. "When I did my first pitch, I didn't even know if we could use Rory and Amy. Now we know that they're coming back, but we can't say under what circumstances. So I've made it clear that the Doctor has popped back in time to take them off for a treat for their wedding anniversary. It's not like they've been travelling around with him all this time!" [CH]

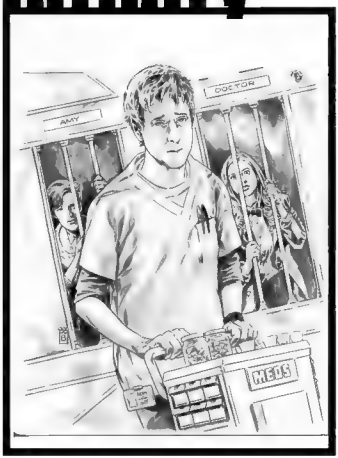
***Doctor Who**'s latest (comic book) reincarnation debuts in September*

Flitting in perfectly at the Crystal Palace.

"I'm aware of what's gone before and I'm trying to be respectful of that"



The Art of Infinity



So closely is he associated with the fairytales of *Fables*, you'd think fantasy would be Mark Buckingham's first love. But it ain't necessarily so…

We can't all manipulate time, more's the pity, so taking on a comic strip as research-intensive as *Doctor Who* can be is nothing to take lightly. Still, Mark Buckingham – though his schedule's already jam-packed with *Fables* and back-ups in *The Goon* and all sorts – just couldn't resist. .

Comic Heroes: You've drawn *Doctor Who* for IDW before, haven't you?
Mark Buckingham: Initially I did a story with Tony Lee in #5 of the previous run, and then I became the regular cover artist. When I found out that they were revamping the book, I said I'd really like to draw an arc, as I wanted to make my mark again on the series proper. I was very pleased when Andy Diggle came on board, because we've known each other for a long time but only ever worked together when he was editing *2000 AD*, never with him as a writer, which I was eager to do

CH: What are your earliest *Doctor Who* memories?
MB: My first Doctor was Jon Pertwee, and it was one of those programmes I fell in love with instantly; I can distinctly remember the Sea Devils and the Autons from those early stories. I've been a pretty dedicated Whovian my whole life, actually. I've got little action figures of the Doctor looking down at me on my drawing board, and my shelves are groaning with a very complete collection of *Doctor Who* DVDs, from the classic series through to the current stuff. It's been with me all along – and it's the one show I've remained faithful to, no matter what changes and transformations it's gone through over the years.

CH: This comic demands a way with actors' faces, but how difficult was it to capture Matt Smith's likeness?
MB: He's got a very distinctive visual presence, and from an illustrator's point of view that makes life a whole lot easier, because it gives you something to work with. If he were too straightforwardly pretty, it would make life a bit more difficult. A lot of his character comes through in the way he moves and acts, so I'm trying to convey that by making him quite animated and showing off his trademark expressions and movements.

CH: And Amy and Rory?
MB: Amy is lovely to draw, because she's very pretty and has very distinctive features. I wasn't completely sure about Rory when I first drew him, but then I did the cover for #11 of the previous series, which really focused on him, and that was when I felt like I'd really got him.

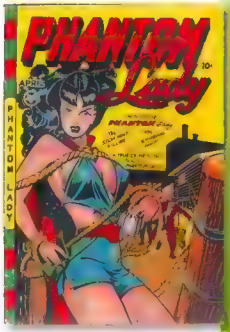
CH: So, how have you been enjoying the Victorian vibe of 'The Hypothetical Gentleman'?
MB: One of the pleasures of *Doctor Who* is the sheer variety and scope of the series, and the fact that you can go from period drama to state-of-the-art sci-fi, and then off to something completely different again. It allows you to bounce around and explore all these different environments. I enjoy the historical dramas, because it gives me a reason to do some research and pay attention to all sorts of details.

CH: You did a three-page prologue to 'The Doctor's Wife' with Neil Gaiman for last year's *Doctor Who: The Brilliant Book 2012*…
MB: I've known Neil for as long as I've been in the business, so it was nice to work with him again. It was also great to do something that was basically canon, and like a kind of DVD extra.

I illustrated what would have been the opening sequence of 'The Doctor's Wife', if time and budget had allowed for another alien planet. And it added weight to my desire to do more *Doctor Who* interior art for IDW. I used a watercolour wash-tone that I developed for the last few covers of the previous IDW run; I enjoyed it so much that I wanted to use it on the interiors too. That's what I'm doing now, and our colourist Charlie Kirchoff is a master of bringing the best out of that technique

OF HOW SOCIALITE SANDRA KNIGHT, DAUGHTER OF A CRUSADING SENATOR, DECIDED
THAN TALK A GOOD FIGHT -
UNIFORM OF THE PHANTOM LADY!

Sandra Knight: a vision in yellow.



THE GOLDEN CHILD

David West talks to writers Justin Gray and Jimmy Palmiotti about Phantom Lady, one of the first ever female superheroes.

For a lass now more than 70 years old, Phantom Lady has hung onto her looks pretty well. This summer DC brings its famously alluring Golden Age crimefighter back into the spotlight through a new miniseries. Sure, she's been kicking around the fringes of the current DCU for some time, but now she joins the ranks of the New 52, and takes her deserved place centre-stage.

But who is this girl? When she debuted in *Police Comics* #1 (August, 1941), Phantom Lady was one Sandra Knight, the daughter of a US senator who fought mobsters and saboteurs using her quick wits, good looks – and a 'Black Light Ray'. Her original costume was a one piece yellow swimsuit, saucily accessorised with a green cape – but when artist Matt Baker took over for a Fox Comics relaunch, her outfit became yet skimpier. Baker drew her with a Betty Page haircut, generous curves and a skin-showcasing blue cutaway romper suit.

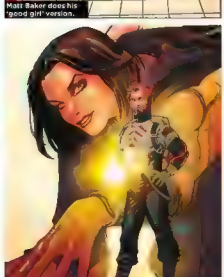
"Sex appeal is inherent across the board within superhero comics," says Palmiotti when asked about Phantom Lady's penchant for risqué outfits. "Our focus is more on developing well-rounded and very human characters inside the suits, rather than riffing on any of the previous controversy this character has inspired."

And it's some history. The first Phantom Lady was passed between various different publishers before rocking up at DC in the early '70s, one of a gang of former Quality Comics characters known as the Freedom Fighters. Their new DC series was set in the parallel universe of Earth-X, but the group was brought into the mainstream DCU in the wake of *Crisis On Infinite Earths*. Sandra retired from crimefighting at this point, and the Phantom Lady mantle was taken up by her protegé Dee Tyler, a skilled martial artist and sleuth – who lasted a few decades until all the Freedom Fighters were wiped out during the bloodbath of *Infinite Crisis*.

To make things yet more confusing, the last time the DCU saw a Phantom Lady she was Stormy Knight, a buxom adventuress – and member of the Freedom Fighters – who had the Betty bangs of the first Phantom Lady, and

PL and her 'Black Light Ray' gloves.

Matt Baker does his 'good girl' version.



An all-new crimefighting duo.

an even skimpier costume, but now even *she* has been replaced. In the brave new world of the New 52, Stormy has been supplanted by Jennifer Knight – her name references the original, but she's a brand new character.

"Jennifer is created in the spirit of all the previous versions," says Palmiotti. "When we were approached about this title we talked about what made the character interesting, and why she stood out from the rest of the DCU. We came up with a version that we think is modern, fun and a little wild. She's still the sexy confident hero, but we dig deeper into what makes her tick."

LIVING DOLL

Joining Jennifer in her crime-busting escapades will be a familiar face from the Freedom Fighters – the diminutive hero Doll Man, whose new identity is, says Gray, "Dane Maxwell, a brilliant scientist obsessed with shrinking things". The duo will face off against "organised crime, mobsters and the corruption that plagues Metropolis – deep beneath Superman's watchful eye," he continues. "Phantom Lady is driven to take down the first family of crime, and as a result Doll Man is the tragic recipient of a superpower he doesn't want. The pair must work together to survive. It's a blend of crime, noir and romance – with a lot of action."

> **"It's a blend of crime, noir and romance – with a lot of action"**

Picking up the thread, Palmiotti adds, "There's probably more pulp in this book than most would expect for a superhero title. You get to really know both of them and their relationship, and then see them at their best and their worst."

Jennifer Knight will be armed with Phantom Lady's signature weapon, the Black Light Ray, but with some new twists.

"We're incorporating the technology of 'black light' into the gloves she wears and the functionality of the costume, which allows her to enter a phantom state," says Gray.

As for the heroine's place in the multiverse, Gray says, "Comic book universes are constantly evolving. To be honest, we didn't take a stance on any particular 'Earth'; we simply wanted to tell a story that introduced Phantom Lady and Doll Man."

Walking in the footsteps of the legendary Baker – as well as previous *PL* artists Jack Kamen, Dick Ayers and Daniel Acuna – is formidable pencil-wielder, and brilliantly-named newcomer to DC Comics, Cat Staggs.

"Cat is making the characters come to life," says Palmiotti, "and she brings a certain look to the project that we love. Cat's making this book her own, and really bringing her work up to a new level – and, as always, the men and women have a certain sex appeal that is fun to play around with."

As for whether this debut presages the resurrection of the entire Freedom Fighters, the writers are unapologetically elusive.

"That's an excellent question," deadpans Palmiotti. "We have some characters showing up in issue #4," hints Gray, "but it really is too early to talk about that right now…" **[CC]**

***Phantom Lady** #1 materialises at comic stores everywhere on 29 August.*

...got changed and went straight there.
'Shit, I'm so early...'
'...hope there's someone in.'

LONDON GIRL

Glyn Dillon makes a triumphant return to comics: washing machines, vinyl toys and homicidal fantasies, wrapped up with a glorious bow of slice-of-life London angst. **By Matt Bielby**

There are a lot of problems with modern comics. Amongst the ones that grate on me: the gigantic, frustrating chasm between the brashly populist and the chin-strokingly Euro-arty, the way Anglo-tradition creators look at Japanese manga, like what they see, and then steal all the wrong bits (like the pointy chins and snail-like pace); the failure to engage (some notable exceptions aside) with female stories in any meaningful way.

THE LONG WAY HOME

And then along comes Glyn Dillon, and I'm reminded, once again, of why I love comics. Glyn's a name from the past – younger brother to the mighty Steve, of *Preacher* and *Punisher* fame, promising Vertigo career cut short – who's suddenly re-emerged with a grim-yet-bouncy tale of mighty ambition and no small craft. *The Nao Of Brown* is an original graphic novel of some 200 pages, set very specifically and recognisably in north west London.

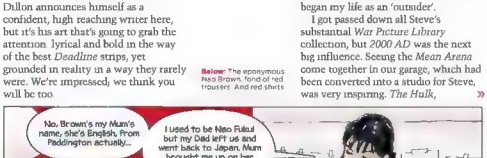
Its lead is an Anglo-Japanese girl of young-Winona Ryder winsomeness, and with a similar mix of hip-geek appeal and hidden darknesses; her life combines kitchen-sink drama with bold fantasy sequences (actually, extracts from the work of a fictitious manga artist), and moments of frightening, self-destructive anger, for now limited to *Billy Liar*-style daydreams.

With its limited watercolour-style palate - chiefly, the reds and greys of London – and confident linework, this is a comic to appeal to about as wide a demographic as the medium ever gets: boys and girls, fans of European biographical comics and the more broken-hearted end of manga, Vertigo readers and Posy Simmonds devotees. Dillon announces himself as a confident, high reaching writer here, but it's his art that's going to grab the attention: lyrical and bold in the way of the best *Deadline* strips, yet grounded in reality in a way they rarely were. We're impressed; we thunk you will be too.

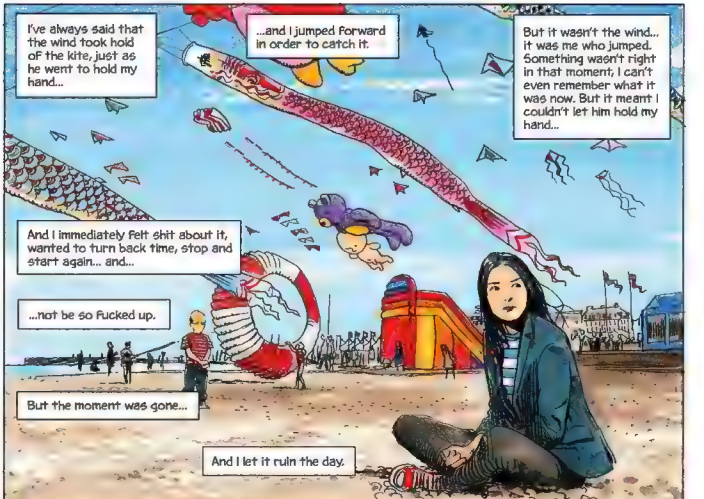
Comic Heroes: With a family like you've got (dad is also an artist), we're guessing comics were always part of your world...

Glyn Dillon: One early memory is of my brother putting my name, spelt backwards, on a plane in a *Nick Fury* strip for *The Hulk Weekly*. I was in the infants at the time, and took that comic into school to unashamedly show off about it. But I was met with: 'Your brother didn't do that! Comics aren't drawn! They're just printed!' And so began my life as an 'outsider'.

I got passed down all Steve's substantial *War Picture Library* collection, but *2000 AD* was the next big influence. Seeing the *Mean Arena* come together in our garage, which had been converted into a studio for Steve, was very inspiring. *The Hulk*, »


No, Brown's my Mum's name, she's English, from Paddington actually...
I used to be Nao Fukui but my Dad left us and went back to Japan. Mum brought me up on her own, so I kinda prefer to go by her name.
Ooh, that's lovely. I'm Pam, Gregory's Mum...

Below: The eponymous Nao Brown, fond of red trousers. And red shirts


I've always said that the wind took hold of the kite, just as he went to hold my hand...
...and I jumped forward in order to catch it.
But it wasn't the wind... it was me who jumped. Something wasn't right in that moment, I can't even remember what it was now. But it meant I couldn't let him hold my hand...
And I immediately felt shit about it, wanted to turn back time, stop and start again... and...
...not be so fucked up.
But the moment was gone...
And I let it ruin the day.

Absolom Daak. Dalek Killer, Judge Dredd: all that stuff has a special place in my heart, because that's when I fell in love with the medium.

CH: You hung out with the *Deadline* crew, of course...

GD: I was really in the 'second wave' of artists; I was 17 or 18 and working on *Crisis* when *Deadline* first started. My brother was keen that there'd be no nepotism – he wanted me to make it on my own merit – and it wasn't until Dave Elliot took over the editing reins that I was asked to do something. So me and Alan [Martin] pitched *Planet Swerve*, and I was onboard.

They were great times. Living in Worthing, we all flat shared, coming up with stupid ideas and helping each other out on all-nighters and deadlines.

Above: Nao recalls a trip to the seaside...

Below: ...that didn't turn out quite as she hoped

My lifelong friends are all from that period, but Jamie Hewlett and Phil Bond were the two artists I looked up to most. I loved that Phil could come up with a wittily written and beautifully drawn four-to-eight pager every month. I could never do that, couldn't do it now. (I'm impatient for a *Wired World* and *Hot Triggers* compendium; surely the time is right?)

Jamie, too. He's obviously gone and done alright for himself, but he was always the one who worked the hardest, and he definitely deserves his rewards. Alan's really made *Tank Girl* come alive again in recent years, but for me – despite the new artists being great 'n' all – it'll always be the original Hewlett/Martin version that I go to. Looking back, I didn't understand how lucky we were, to be able to have a stupid idea in the pub, then two weeks later it'd be on sale in WHSmith

CH: You've said Moebius is your favourite artist. What is it you like about him?

GD: A lot of great things were written about him after he passed away this year, and the fact that I couldn't stop myself crying when I heard the news – despite having never met the man – goes some way towards showing how much he meant to me. His effortless line always amazed me, his incredible imagination, his ability to jump between wildly different styles, while still maintaining his identity. He was a true genius – and there's not many of them about.

I think if you were to trawl back through some of my *Deadline* efforts you'd see a more direct influence (or, to be honest, me shamelessly ripping him off). But I think having grown up, and the fact that I had a long break from comics, gave me the freedom to develop my own style – which is, of course, what Jean Giraud would have wanted.

In terms of *The Nao Of Brown*, the 'Ichi' pages – the story within the story – are supposed to be drawn by a fictional half-French, half-Japanese artist, thus allowing me to try my best to emulate my two, maybe three, favourite artists: Moebius, Miyazaki and Otomo. But they were just my influences – I haven't ripped off anything directly!

There was that kite festival years ago...
He was a bit sea-sick on the ferry over from Newhaven.
Then he bought me the best box kite you've ever seen....
I loved that kite
We walked along the Esplanade... both a little drunk.

Once upon a time there was a warring family who possessed riches plenty but had secured little happiness...
One night, by the light of a full moon, the kinship... disguised as a brown snake, came upon their house and turned them all into a single tree, all except the youngest son Peter, who was good... he was playing down by the lake with the firefly, so as to avoid his squabbling kin.
But this tree was no ordinary elm and therefore the first sap an ordinary tree it grew barbed twist across his boughs in order to confuse its quarry. The tree, whose branches now mingled amongst themselves, fought to bend it wrenched itself from the ground.
The good boy Peter, on returning from the lake to find his family uprooted, fell to his knees broken hearted. He started raking the stones around him, in order to kill himself.
On seeing this, the Norking became a pair of 'pros' and finished the most perfect, small white stone. When Peter ate this stone he turned pale, but true. Then the two birds said to Peter "You will be half boy, half tree, for a time above and three more years and if during that time nobody falls in love with you... you and your family will stay this way forever."
The tree was untroubled, knowing how good a boy Peter was. It insisted he go find a wife as soon as he could... then it said, no, he must stay and look after the house... and so the quarrelling began anew.
And Peter turned from his tree saying, "I shall chop my chops and head for the woods. I promise to come back married..."

CH: Readers may remember you from Vertigo: maybe *Shade The Changing Man*, or the 1995 miniseries *Egypt*...

GD: It's funny. At the time there was a bit of a comics boom, and suddenly we were getting offered very healthy page rates from DC Vertigo. I got to do a few things with Pete Milligan, who I always thought was a genius. But it was also around that time that things started to change in Worthing; we were no longer the youngest kids on the block. (I'd loved it when I was the same age as all the local art students!) But we were all getting older, and the new art school girls were getting younger. It felt like the right time to break away if I fancied I might be able to make it as a director, so I headed up to London in search of storyboarding work as part of the 'masterplan'.

As it happened, the friends we made through *Deadline* were all becoming successful bands, and Britpop was beginning to blossom. I did a bit of storyboarding for commercials, and a few videos here and there, but I also went on a European tour with Pulp as their 'swagman' (the person who sells the merchandise). I worked at Jim Henson's for a few years, got into concept design as well as storyboarding, made friends with the amazing Dermot Power, Rob Bliss, guys like that. Storyboarded on location in Turkey for three months. Had lots of amazing adventures, intense relationships, drank and drugged myself silly – all culminating in a big nervous breakdown at about 30.

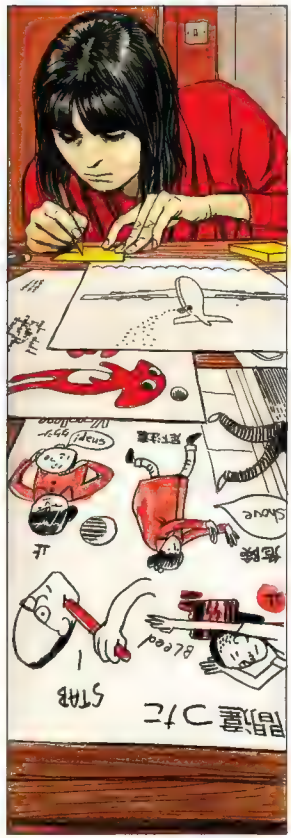
CH: And that, we're guessing, was part of the genesis of *The Nao Of Brown*?

GD: Originally it was going to be more Gregory's story, and I wanted to do it for a possible anthology comic – much like *Deadline*, really. Alan Martin, who I'd pitched my idea to, was into it – but busy with *Tank Girl* commitments. However, it wasn't long before I'd come up with enough material to consider going it alone, without the help of a proper writer. Alan gave me his blessing and I forged on, a bit scared.

CH: Where does the OCD aspect come from; is it something you suffer from?

GD: In 2001 I ended up in the Nightingale Mental Health Hospital in Marylebone for three months, diagnosed with depression and addiction issues. I was in therapy for a year, got completely clean and sorted a lot of stuff out. At the same time it rekindled my interest in Carl Jung, and I became intrigued by all kinds of mental disorders – but the specific interest in OCD came when I saw the Channel 4 programme *House Of OCD* (This was a while after my treatment, and I was now happily married.)

Around the same time I'd started taking a course in meditation at a Buddhist centre. The often misguided idea about meditation is that you're *trying* to empty your mind; the 'trying' is what makes that impossible, and I saw parallels between that and people with OCD. The more they tried to control their mind, the more out of control it would get. This was where a lot of themes in the book came from.



Above: Nao's doodles reveal the morbid obsessions that plague her thoughts

Then, over a period of time, my wife revealed to me that she'd suffered terribly with OCD as a child and into

her late teens. Not the same kind of obsessive thoughts as Nao, but she did have similar compulsions, the mental rituals performed to ease the anxiety. She was very supportive of me doing the book, and a great sounding board. Although Nao is a fictional character, it was a very personal project.

CH: A big, original graphic novel that you write and draw yourself seems a daunting way back into comics...

GD: I was fed up with trying to get pet projects off the ground in film and television. Even when working with Jamie Hewlett on something, after all his success with Gorillaz, we were so close to closing a big deal in Hollywood – only for them to say at the last minute that there was no way we could own any of it. Apparently our first go round the block in Hollywood had to be at our own expense!

Suddenly I saw the beautiful simplicity of sitting at my desk, on my own, in my spare time and just doing my own thing. It was a proper little epiphany, and so I just got going – and I would've kept going, I think, until a mutual friend told Doug at Self Made Hero about my blog, which I'd started just to track my progress and post up the occasional teasers. Luckily, Emma and Doug at SMH seemed to be into what I was doing, and I liked them instantly. Their catalogue wasn't as big then as it is now, but it was easy to tell they had passion and seemed to know what they were doing. I feel very lucky to be with them.

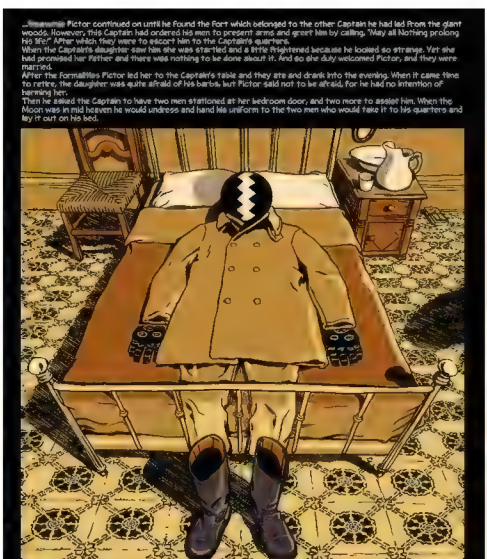
CH: Did you write it very tightly first, or just loosely plan it?

GD: I had a weird three days quite early on, when I found a certain Jung quote and a washing machine quote all in the same bookshop, on this one weirdly-lit evening. A bookshop that had seemingly appeared out of nowhere, on a street that I thought I knew well – but it hadn't had a bookshop the last time I'd been there. It all felt a bit magic, like Mr Benn's shopkeeper appearing. And in the two days that followed I'd managed to plot out the whole book.

Then, when I got the interest from SMH, I wrote a one page 'elevator pitch' – then a four page treatment, which showed more about the characters. Then, finally, an 11-page treatment that plotted out everything that happened, but in a bare bones kinda fashion. I'd also already drawn, painted and lettered the first 11 or 12 pages as a sample of the artwork.

Once the deal was agreed I had three months to deliver the finished script. That first draft was the toughest – then, like everyone says, each subsequent draft got easier. I called in Si Spencer, ex-*Deadline* editor and now professional script doctor, and with each new draft I'd email it to him and we would meet in his office – the pub – to go through his red pen notes.

It took six drafts before I delivered it to them, and then the final draft was done during the lettering: that was the most satisfying edit of all, losing whole unnecessary word balloons or captions. Because it'd been such a long time since I'd written it, it was much easier to see what was working and what wasn't.


...Pictor continued on until he found the fort which belonged to the other Captain he had led from the giant woods. However, this Captain had ordered his men to present arms and greet him by calling, 'Way all Nothing prolong his life!' After which they were to escort him to the Captain's quarters.
When the Captain's daughter saw him she was startled and a little frightened because he looked so strange. Yet she had promised her Father and there was nothing to be done about it. And so she duly welcomed Pictor, and they were married.
After the Formalities Pictor led her to the Captain's table and they ate and drank into the evening. When it came time to retire, the daughter was quite afraid of his barbs, but Pictor said not to be afraid, for he had no intention of harming her.
Then he asked the Captain to have two men stationed at her bedroom door, and two more to assist him. When the Moon was in mid heaven he would undress and hand his uniform to the two men who would take it to his quarters and lay it out on his bed.
Then one would stand guard at the door while the other would follow him out to the shore. There he would stand safeguard as Pictor sits and sets fire to his head. When the head was almost entirely consumed, the soldier was to chop it off last not with his sword, he must instead use a reed. Then he must bury what was left of the head in the sand and return with the body.

CH: Tell us a bit about the art style.

GD: Pedro Almodóvar always does great stuff with colour: his films look like beautiful European comics come to life. I'm a big fan of his, and his director of photography Jose Luis Alcaine – as well as costume designer Bina Daigeler. When it came to colour, the film *Volver* was a big influence on *Nao*.

Storyboarding adverts involves drawing people doing mundane things sitting around tables, driving cars, etc. The kitchen sink/washing machine realism comes pretty easily to me.

CH: Who are these characters? And, to your mind, what are they about?

GD: They're all me in some way or another, because I imagined them, they had to go through the 'filter of me'. Some of the stories happened to friends. One Steve story, in particular, was my very own – but it wasn't the worst one, it was the one with the duvet. And Nao's 'fly story' happened to me, exactly as it's told in the book.

I wrote Gregory as a poetry lover because I'm always impressed by people who've memorised poetry, not because

Above: The rather Moebius inspired 'ish sequences have an intriguing, dreamy feel.

"The kitchen sink/washing machine realism comes pretty easily to me"

"...I have come to help you renew your vocation, your devotion to the commonplace, to the over-looked... to the sacred routine..."
"The mysterious is right under your nose, all time is inside you... Inside the spinning of my machine."
"Yes, those socks are phallic, that Bold bottle too... the cleansing 'agent'. Don't be afraid of them... take your masculine makeup with you. It's part of the cycle, part of the spin..."
私はどのぐらい眠りましたか
"Nothing stands still."
"You are smiling. You think it is funny, to replace Botticelli's sea shell with a washing machine..."
"I am the Venus who lives in your machines. Don't take them for granted... Don't malign the machines as you fix them."
"Thank them for the work they do. For deities live in ordinary places."

they're trying to show off, but because they *love* it. Writing him has increased my appreciation of poetry, and I'm trying to learn two poems right now.

CH: Tell us a bit about the 'Ichi' pages, and how you came up with their very different style...

GD: I don't really want to explain the 'Ichi' story; I think that's something for the reader to work out for themselves But I really enjoyed doing them, and it was a challenge to try to make them feel as though they were by another artist: I had to, y'know, get into character Colouring it digitally was a lot of fun, and quicker than my watercolour method. But then I did take longer drawing those pages, because they had to be tighter and cleaner

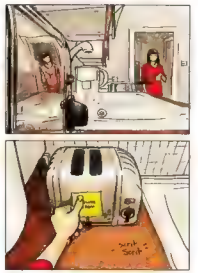
If those pages get a good response, I've definitely considered doing more [Of course I'd have to do it as Gil Ichiyama, 'cos it's his stuff really!]

CH: You're using Photoshop as an intrinsic part of your artistic process now, aren't you?

GD: Yes! A wonderful tool, taught to me by Rob Bliss, who'd hit my hand with his ruler if I asked stupid questions or forgot what he'd already taught me

It's easy to play around with the levels, so a crisp HB pencil line suddenly looks like a fresh and spontaneous inked line I'd always wanted to ink like Hugo Pratt, with that kind of loose abandonment, and Photoshop allowed me to retain the freshness of that original pencil line. On all my previous comics work, I always felt like my inking had killed the image; now, if a panel goes wrong, I'll just throw it away and do it again.

I drew all of *Nao* on bog-standard photocopy paper, using a retractable HB pencil, then I darkened up the line in Photoshop and printed it out as a very faint grey onto watercolour paper. I'd then paint the watercolour page and, after scanning that in, I could put them back together digitally in Photoshop Scanning always slightly deforms the image, so I was matching it panel by panel rather than page by page, but it was still a safety net – if I fucked up the painting on one panel, the whole page wasn't ruined like it would've been in the old days Means there's not much in the way of 'original full colour artwork' to sell on, but a lot of the pencilled pages look nice!



Above: Wise words from the deity of the washing machine

then paint the watercolour page and, after scanning that in, I could put them back together digitally in Photoshop Scanning always slightly deforms the image, so I was matching it panel by panel rather than page by page, but it was still a safety net – if I fucked up the painting on one panel, the whole page wasn't ruined like it would've been in the old days Means there's not much in the way of 'original full colour artwork' to sell on, but a lot of the pencilled pages look nice!

CH: Now you're done with this, how's your love of comics getting on?

GD: I *love* comics! But when I started on this, I felt I had some catching up to do I'd never read *Maus*! I read all six volumes of *Akira*, I read Tatsumi's *A Drifting Life*, my wife was a *Tintin* fan as a child, so I read her collection for the first time with my son. Tonci Zonjic gave me a great manga reading list to get through. All comic artists/writers should definitely have a look at *Bakuman* The whole thing has been a massive learning curve, and a very enjoyable one. But it's been very intense too and the last two years I've never worked harder in my entire life.

I feel I've been kind of spoilt now, though, as SMH let me make it exactly how I wanted: I chose the paper stock, did the design with my friend Kate McLauchlan. It might be hard to go back to being just a 'penciller' – not that there's anything wrong with that! Sadly, though, comics don't pay the same way as storyboarding can. Storyboarding, despite feeling soul destroying sometimes, gives me the room to maybe come up with something new in my spare time. So I'd love to do another book for SMH, maybe an adaptation, but there are no immediate plans

CH: And finally, what is it with all the washing machines anyway?

GD: Yeah! What *is* it with washing machines? **[HB]**

***The Nao Of Brown**, from Self Made Hero, is out in September; meanwhile, check out the preview in* Giant-Size Sidekick, *free with this issue.*

GARTH ENNIS

If you like profanity, alcohol, gore, war, religion-bashing, broad comedy and a soupçon of sentimentality – and hey, who doesn't? – **James Lovegrove** has the writer for you...

Over a career spanning more than two decades and he's showing no sign of slowing down – Garth Ennis has made quite the name for himself For some (and *Comic Heroes* veers this way) he's just about the most consistently top notch writer we've got; for others, he's a one-trick pony and shock-merchant. What's perhaps most remarkable is that he's been right in the centre of things for so long – writing prolifically for the Big Two, taking lengthy stints at *2000 AD*, and cropping up at almost every indie publisher there is – without ever really doing what the mainstream likes, or thinks it likes. Certainly, he tends to shy from superheroes – and when he does venture into the long underwear genre, usually it's to jam a grenade up its backside and pull out the pin.

Born in County Down, Northern Ireland, in 1970, Ennis first appeared on the discerning comic reader's radar in the late '80s, at the tender age of 19, turning in an assured job on a strip called *Troubled Souls* for the worthy, promising, not-that-sadly-missed fortnightly anthology title *Crisis*. Grim but funny, it took a nuanced, non-partisan approach to the Irish 'Troubles', showing how individuals matter more than politics or religion (Ennis dismisses it now as a calculated attempt to get a foot on the comics industry ladder, but the right people certainly noticed, and it immediately marked him out as a writer of note. It was also the first of his many successful collaborations with artist, and Belfast contemporary, John McCrea.)

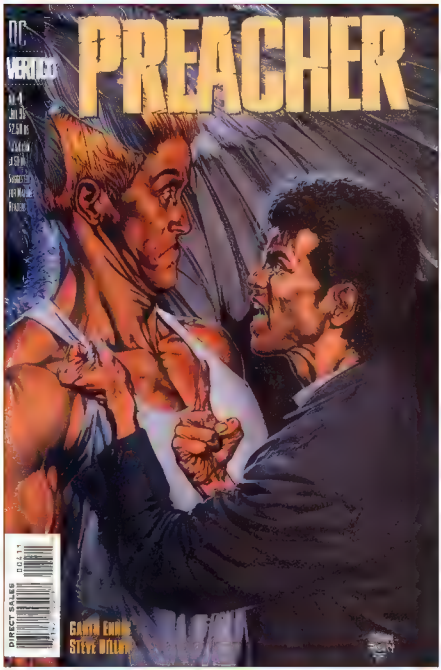
Ennis graduated to *2000 AD*, and was soon writing *Judge Dredd* scripts – an arc set in a parodic 'theme park' future Ireland, 'Emerald Isle', is well remembered – and was making inroads into the US market by 1991, contributing memorable runs to *Hellblazer* and Marvel's *Punisher*, while always keeping his creative hand in with more left field, perhaps less obviously commercial fare: *Hitman*, *Goddess*, *Bloody Mary*, *Pride & Joy*, *Just A Pilgrim* and many more. It was in the mid-'90s he scored his biggest 'crossover' hit – the critically acclaimed, and huge commercial success, *Preacher* for DC's Vertigo imprint.

Since then, Ennis seems to have made it his business to single handedly revive that unloved and unfashionable thing, the war comic. He grew up reading *Commando*, *Battle Picture Library* and *Charley's War*, and this is the genre in which he is clearly happiest and most comfortable. (Though horror, too, has proved fertile ground for him, with the likes of *Crossed* and military/zombie mash-up *Stitched* proving extremely popular.)

Certain themes crop up again and again in Ennis' work: small groups of men working together under pressure; true heroism, self-sacrifice almost guaranteed; a deep-seated contempt for authority. He prefers to tell the tales of loners, losers and outsiders – people who are thoroughly proficient at what they do, maybe, but don't have the establishment on their side. A deep antipathy towards organised Christianity is a constant refrain, as is a deep-seated respect for the blood, bravery and sacrifice of ordinary soldiers on the battlefield.

Perhaps surprisingly, one of Ennis' latest projects is a light hearted illustrated children's book, *ERF*. But what he's known for is providing strong, bloody men's tales – real red meat fiction. Here is a sampling of the best... »

GLENN
FABRY
'96



THE BLASPHEMOUS ONE: PREACHER

Preacher is many things: modern day cowboy yarn, atheist tract, love story, supernatural thriller, homage to the myths of America, character comedy, and a great deal more besides. What it is most of all, though, is a freewheeling road movie designed to offend almost everybody worth offending, all of the time. A man has sex with an armadillo. A teenager attempts to commit suicide by shotgun – and ends up with a face looking like an arse. A bad guy is repeatedly and progressively disfigured, his humiliations extending to having the top of his bald head carved with a knife so that it resembles a cartoon penis. If you don't fancy reading about any of that, move on, we've barely scratched the surface here.

It all begins when an unlikely Texan priest, Jesse Custer, decides to go in search of god – literally. He wants a word with the almighty, who he reckons has abdicated his responsibilities. Custer is gifted with a heavenly superpower – he can compel obedience with the sound of his voice – but since this makes life too easy for him (and potentially diffuses dramatic tension) Ennis increasingly downplays this ability, or finds reasons why Custer can't use it. He focuses, instead, on our hero's ambivalent bromance with boozy Irish vampire Cassidy, and his difficult relationship with the sexy, damaged Tulip. This trio forms the core of a narrative which may at times ramble, but seldom loses its grip.

THE ANTI-SUPERHEROIC ONE: THE BOYS

Ennis makes no bones about his loathing for the superhero genre. He objects to World War 2 spandex types such as Captain America, calling them 'borderline offensive, because to me the reality of World War 2 was very human people, ordinary flesh-and-blood guys who slogged it out in miserable, flooded foxholes'. His reason for satirising and subverting the superhero archetype is simply, he says, 'a total lack of respect'.

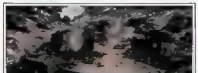
Hence, whenever he gets close to them things get ugly: we have a drunken Hitman vomiting on Batman's boots, and a comic built around a scabby prostitute getting superpowers (*The Pro*). And so we get to *The Boys*, in which superheroes are the artifically augmented pawns of a corrupt US administration, and we hang with a deep cover black ops outfit dedicated to policing them and, should they misbehave, terminating them with extreme prejudice.

The Boys isn't as scabrous, touching or shocking as *Preacher*, but remains a complex, compelling read nonetheless. If the book were merely a diatribe, it would be boring. Instead, it gleefully deconstructs the inherent absurdity of the concept – and dares to suggest that there's something more than a little perverted about running around in a skintight costume thinking you're miles better than the common herd.

OH, WHAT'S TO BE DONE, MY POOR LITTLE MAN?
WITH THE TWO OF US ON YOUR TAIL?
4: ON THE FIRST DAY OF JULY
GARTH ENNIS Writer
HOWARD CHAYKIN Art
BRIAN REBER Color Art
TODD KLEIN Lettering
JOHN CASSADAY with LAURA MARTIN Cover
WILL PANZO Asst. Editor
NICK LOWE Editor
JOE QUESADA Editor-in-Chief
DAN BUCKLEY Publisher

THE WAR-IS-HELL ONE: WAR STORY

Ennis' love of war comics finds its fullest expression in this series of eight standalone combat tales, loosely presented as a miniseries, which doffs a cap to the digest-sized Fleetway *Battle Picture Library* booklets of yore, right down to the use of large, rectangular panels. His background research is clearly extensive and detailed, allowing Ennis to paint a realistic portrait of ordinary men under intense, almost intolerable pressure. It helps that he's accompanied by some of the best artists in the business, among them Chris Weston, Dave Gibbons, David Lloyd, Cam Kennedy and Carlos Ezquerra. All seem to relish the opportunity to draw tanks, Spitfires and Sten guns instead of the usual steroidal supermen in capes and cowls.



Battlefields, a similar sequence of three-issue miniseries, is also worth checking out. There's little humour here, and nothing in the way of slapstick violence – just true-to-life human stories, often horrific, usually gut-wrenching, never anything less than heartfelt.

THE ONE THAT'S BLEAKER THAN A BLEAK THING FROM BLEAKVILLE: CROSSED

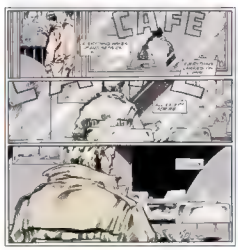
Crossed contains so many I-can't-believe-he-just-did-that moments, it's a wonder that Fredric Wertham hasn't risen from his grave shouting, 'Corruption! Depravity! I told you so!' Yet in amongst the post-apocalyptic carnage, as humankind succumbs to a mystery affliction that turns people into cannibalistic psychopaths, Ennis has an intriguing point to make. It isn't the disease itself that triggers these unspeakable acts; the propensity is already there, latent in all of us. Again, it's Ennis' characterisation skills that make it work. The story would simply be an exercise in splatter and outrage if it wasn't anchored around people much like ourselves, full of good intentions, all too human and frail.

THE ONE THAT MIGHT UPSET THE ANTI-SMOKING LOBBY: HELLBLAZER

Ennis' first crack at John Constantine was also his best. The 'Dangerous Habits' storyline extrapolates a logical outcome of the British punk mage's fondness for the ciggies – terminal lung cancer. How Constantine copes with this death sentence, and what he does to buck it, certainly makes for gripping comics. Even though we know he's unlikely to be killed off, his fate seems to hang in the balance right up until the end.

Later Ennis *Hellblazer* arcs – such as 'Damnation's Flame' and 'Rake At The Gates of Hell' – are also hugely enjoyable, however. As with *Preacher*, it's the supporting cast who shine here, the antihero surrounded by a group of credibly drawn friends and allies who know him for the self-serving son of a bitch he is, but stick with him anyway.

'Dangerous Habits', by the way, was the basis for the botched *Constantine* movie, with Keanu Reeves. But we can't blame Ennis for that.



WARRIOR OF THE WORLDS

HG Well's Martians were back and victory was assured – but not if a space Spartacus called Killraven had his way... **By Matt Bielby**

These days, in the heat of mainstream comics' frenzy of revamps and reigns, it hardly seems six months go by without the status quo taking a battering from this direction or that. How different 40 years back, with Marvel's 'Phase Two': the FF, Spidey and the rest were allowed to plough forward, unmolested, but now they were joined by a raft of new characters and concepts, specialist interest books that echoed their times and were, in their own small way, almost as radical as anything Stan, Jack and Steve had managed a decade earlier.

It was the time of Luke Cage and *Tomb Of Dracula*, Howard the Duck and Shang-Chi. Stan Lee was pretty much done as a creative force by now, but not as a manager. He'd wrestled back boardroom control of Marvel in a grueling fat-cat fight, and now encouraged his heir, Roy Thomas, to aim comics at those segments of the population Marvel was currently missing – girls, black guys and (boosted by the success of *The Exorcist*) horror fans. Sci-fi he was less sold on – yes, it was big at the book stores, but the films kept flopping – though the new generation of ex fan creators *were* keen. Inspired by 'The Kree-Skrull War' in *The Avengers*, hotshot artists like Jim Starlin and Howard Chaykin kept pushing for more SF, and, hey, a trial run in recently revived '60s anthology title *Amazing Adventures* didn't sound *too* risky...

Thus *The War Of The Worlds* debuted in May 1973, behind cover imagery of tripods, America ablaze and a red-haired rebel dressed for disco in his *Zardoz* thigh-high boots. This trio sold a brilliantly simple Thomas high-concept: 100 years after their 1901 trouncing, HG Wells' Martians have returned – and this time they've taken their flu jabs.

"THE MARTIANS CHOSE THE FLAME WELL"

Our story begins with Earth defeated, its cities in ruins. Jonathan Raven is a young man raised to fight in the cruel, baby-eating Martians' gladiatorial arenas, but they've made a mistake, for this kid's Robin Hood and Spartacus, Roj Blake and John Connor all rolled into one – a 'rebel incarnate, circa 2019'. Soon he's escaping, and gathering about him a small band of freedom fighters dedicated to first freeing Earth, then taking their war back to Mars itself.

Oh sure, it takes a while to find its feet: Chaykin's briefly aboard, Neal Adams delivers some spectacular imagery to the first issue, but early days it's a right old creator mash-up, few writers or artists deliver more than an issue or two until, with *Amazing Adventures* #21, things start clicking into place. Now *The War of the Worlds/ Killraven, Warrior Of The Worlds* (no one ever seemed quite sure what the strip was actually called) would become a second arena for the florid invention of Don McGregor, the Marvel editorial assistant who'd shown such ambition and energy on the classic *Black Panther* epic, 'Panther's Rage'.

McGregor's style was pompous, clunky and wordy – but also thrillingly adult and 'difficult', heaving with pop psychology and characters endlessly expounding on their inner lives. That there's a real cost to this scrap with the Martians, their mutant monsters and human agents soon becomes apparent – when a major character dies in #34 it has genuine weight – and the friendships and rivalries between the core rebel gang ring true. These were comics for grown ups, offering little to children – except, of course, the action, which had a Mel Gibson-esque obsession with cruelty and torture.

McGregor's first regular artist, Herb Trimpe, is good at the mutant beasties, but things really take off with the

PROLOGUE: 2018 A.D.
STEEL UPON STEEL! A SOUND AS EVIL AS THE SCREECH OF THE DAMNED!
STEEL UPON STEEL! FOR ONE HUNDRED YEARS, A SOUND ENCOMPASSING THE ENTIRE PLANET!
STEEL UPON STEEL! FOR THE FIRST TIME IN A NEW BREED OF MEN — MEN WHOSE LIVES HAD BEEN SHATTERED EVEN AS THE CITY

arrival of kindred spirit P Craig Russell on art – his style a little bit Starlin, a lot Barry Windsor-Smith, and pure Marvel of the period. It was as if a sensitive Art Nouveau illustrator had whacked on a Yes album, gone wild with the acid tabs, and then overdosed on Ditko and Kirby 13-panel grids became common, layouts experimental, sequences where the whole comic lurches into an illustrated picture book style for a page or two less and less unusual

"SWORDS VERSUS SCIENCE GONE MAD!"

At its peak *Killraven*'s quite something: poetic and thrilling, bleak and hopeful .Russell draws a *lot* of leaves occasionally we forget we're in post apocalyptic America, and the narrative takes on the aspect of an Arcadian fairytale.) It's brave too. the first full-on interracial kiss in mainstream American comics took place here. Lee had been right— the audience wasn't huge – but those who loved it *really* loved it.

The universe of *Killraven* one of Marvel's many alternate futures, not the 'real' one – came to an abrupt halt with the quiet, talky #39, clearly designed as an interlude issue; *Amazing Adventures* had been cancelled for a second time. Five-and-some years later we got a damp squib conclusion in the first tranche of Marvel graphic novels (Russell now draws our hero with short hair – less glam rock, but it feels like a different guy!), and there've been a few revivals since, notably an Alan Davis

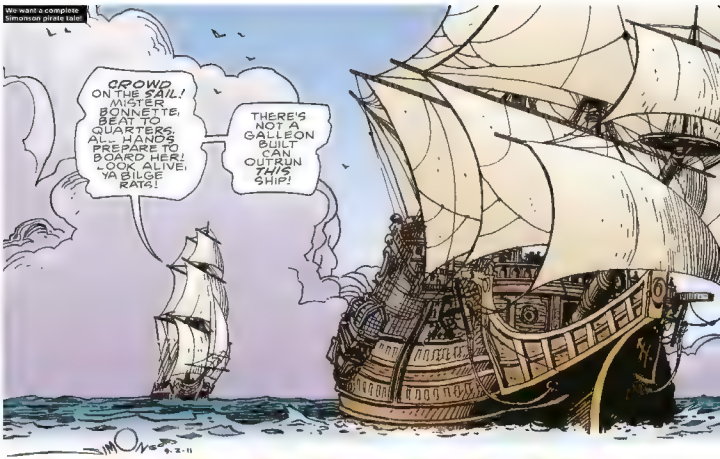
Above: Killraven handy with fists and sword as you'd need to be in a get up like that

munseries in 2002. None have set the world alight.

It all kind of peters out, in other words, which is a real shame – for at its best [we especially like issues featuring villain Skar, a relentless Terminator-type with a massive hole where his eyes and nose should be] this is some strip, romantic and haunting, bold and lyrical. Marvel's 'Phase Two' had bigger hits, but few more memorable stories

The ***Essential Killraven Vol #1*** *contains this entire* ***Amazing Adventures*** *run an associated copy of* ***Marvel Team-Up****, the later graphic novel, and a much later* ***Marvel Knights*** *one-shot revival, it's the painted colour of this last, weak sister pair that suffers most from the stack-'em-high format*

Familiar faces, and others more obscure.


We want a complete Simonson pirate tale!
CROWD ON THE SAIL! MISTER BONNETTE, BEAT TO QUARTERS. ALL HANDS PREPARE TO BOARD HER! LOOK ALIVE, YA BILGE RATS!
THERE'S NOT A GALLEON BUILT CAN OUTRUN THIS SHIP!

ON THE MONEY

New graphic novel *The Judas Coin* promises to span the *entire history* of the DC Universe. Who better to take it on, then, than industry legend Walt Simonson, master of the powerful, fluid visual and the mythic storyline? **By Joel Meadows**

Veteran comics creator Walter Simonson has worked in the industry since the early '70s. He first came to prominence with the award-winning *Manhunter* series, which ran in DC's *Detective Comics* for a while, but he has gone on to work on everything from Marvel's *Thor*, *Fantastic Four* and *X-Factor* to DC's *Superman* and *Orion*. He's even worked with fantasy legend Michael Moorcock on *Elric: The Making of A Sorcerer*.

This September sees the culmination of what is perhaps his most ambitious project to date. *The Judas Coin* is a 96-page original graphic novel featuring a selection of DC's more esoteric characters – and an appearance from Batman. The book is built up of six loosely connected stories, each set in a different era of the DC universe.

"This whole project really began as an issue of *Solo*," reveals Simonson. "*Solo* was the comic that Mark Chiarello came up with for DC. He asked me to do one issue, which was a series of short stories – and that was really the genesis of the whole project. I plotted six stories while, in the meantime, I was working on *Elric* with Mike Moorcock – which took a long time, because it was about 200 pages or so. By the time I was done with that, *Solo* was over – so I spoke to Dan DiDio about doing maybe one more issue."

Happily, DC liked the idea, suggesting Simonson get hold of an editor and put in a proposal for a 96-page hardcover. "So it went from a regular comic to 96 pages," he says, laughing. "Turned out I'd been *very* optimistic about how much I could cram into 44!"

Comic Heroes: The book is broken down into six stories of differing lengths. Did you approach each one differently?

Walt Simonson: The very first chapter is really a prologue – a four-page introduction that sets up the premise for the whole book by showing the [Biblical] 30 pieces of silver, what happens to one of them, and essentially how that piece of silver gets out into the world. The text is pretty minimal but I wanted a really rich look to it, as well as a period feel. I was very much inspired by the work of an artist called Victor Ambrus. He was born in Hungary, but he left as a very young man and came to England and he's just done loads of beautiful work.

CH: The second story features the Golden Gladiator, quite an obscure DC character...

WS: I wanted to find several stories across the DC universe that would range in time from the death of Christ and into the future, so for one of them I had to hunt around for something »

> **"The text is pretty minimal but I wanted a really rich look to it, as well as a period feel"**

MANHUNTER 2070
AN EPILOG-2087

THE SHADOWS OF JUPITER'S MOONS HAVE HUNG ABOVE MY HOME FOR MORE THAN FIFTEEN YEARS.
EXOTIC WOMEN, PRE-APOCALYPSE LIQUORS, RAUCOUS PARTIES, FINE ART. A MILLION FRIENDS...
...I'VE A COMPLETE CATALOG OF THE BEST THAT CIVILIZATION HAS LEFT TO OFFER.
IT'S NOT ENOUGH
SQUEIK!
OH, NO.
DISTRESS CALL FROM THE ASTRA-GALLS INDICATES THAT SHE WAS BEING ATTACKED BY A SINGLE VESSEL.
16
SHE CARRIES A PRICE-LESS CARGO OF ANCIENT AND RARE COINS BOUND FOR THE MUSEUM PLANET OF LITHOSPHERE.
HER PRESENT POSITION IS BEYOND THE JURIS-DICTION OF EITHER THE SUB-ETHEREAL RANGERS OR TRIPLANETARY.
Corporate Psike--Grade 5-- Still Missing
FORTUNATELY, I HAVE A JOB.

Manhunter: 2070 is a manga-style future.

set during the Roman Empire. I wasn't really familiar with the Golden Gladiator until I did some research. He only appeared in five or six stories, in *The Brave And The Bold* in the early '60s. Russ Heath drew them and they're really quite beautiful. Because it looks back to an earlier historical era, I thought it'd be fun to try a classic, or classical comic book, approach.

When I was about 10, a movie came out called *Helen Of Troy*. Dell Comics did a beautiful adaptation with six-panel pages – it's very straightforward graphically, very beautifully rendered and it wasn't until years later that I discovered that it was penciilled by John Buscema. I don't know who did it, but it's almost classically inked – not like engraving, but very clean. I can see the influence of guys like Hal Foster and Alex Raymond. So John's comic led me back to Hal Foster. I looked at a lot of *Prince Valiant*, and at John's comic, and I did *Golden Gladiator* similarly conservatively.

CH: You have a reputation as an artist who can get obsessed with research – did you do lots for *Golden Gladiator*?

WS: I tried to draw reasonably accurate human figures, and not to push beyond what people actually looked like at the time. I couldn't find any Germanian inns from that period, but I found some other reconstructed buildings from about the same era, which I used for guidance.

There were some really cool reconstructions of bars, with big casks of beer underneath with big holes in them, so the barman could just reach down with a glass, scoop up the beer and give it to the patron. I tried to make it a reasonably historically accurate and restrained rendering of the story in order for it to be persuasive. So it involved a ton of historical research, and I was much more restrained in the drawing than I'd normally be.

CH: In the next chapter, *The Viking Prince*, you travel in time to the Dark Ages. What stylistic challenges did that throw up?

WS: The Viking Prince is another *The Brave And The Bold* character, originally drawn by Joe Kubert. In the past couple of years, DC has put out a collection of this material – but I already had the odd issue, and loved them when I was young. It's interesting, you can see Joe's development as an artist very clearly. The early work is obviously early Kubert, but by the later stuff it's clear that he's matured as an artist. I realised pretty rapidly, though, that there's just not a chance in hell that *I'm* going to be Joe Kubert. Also, Joe was obviously doing the Wagnerian Vikings, with wings on their helmets – not the way the Vikings really were, but the popular image of them.

So I thought about doing real Vikings – since I did *Thor* so many years ago, I still have a ton of books and reference on actual Viking culture and costumes. I'm a big fan of the French artist Philippe Druillet, so I loved the idea of this over-the-top, completely insane strip. I liked the idea that Jon and his Vikings would be sailing on a ship with a city on it, I liked the idea that the trees of Germania were 1,000 feet tall, I liked the idea of quasi-Celtic Druid-type guys who had an idol that was 15 storeys high.

And so the silver coin begins its journey...
THE MAN CAME TO REGRET HIS ACTIONS, BITTERLY.
BUT WHEN HE TRIED TO RECLAIM THE MONEY...
...IT WAS REFUSED...

CH: You moved from the Viking period to a character you'd actually drawn more than 30 years ago: Captain Fear.

WS: I did a story in 1980 with David Michelinie, and we had a lot of fun doing it. It was a short story – about 18 pages long, with about three chapters – and I found catalogues of old typefaces that existed long before the days of computer fonts. So I found a really cool antique Caslon face, and I lettered it by hand – and hand-lettered the sound effects. I didn't do the stones in the book in the order that they're printed – I did *Golden Gladiator* first, and the last was *Captain Fear*. By that time I'd tried several different approaches to the storytelling and – since I'd done the character before myself – I just drew this one like me, not as an homage to any other artist. I'd already done the research, as I have all these books left over from my original work, so I've got tons of sailing ship references. John lettered this one, but I asked him to do the sound effects in an

"I found catalogues of old typefaces that existed long before computer fonts"

Each story enjoys its own specific art style.

Walt Simonson: 40 years wowing fans!

antique Caslon face to give the story a little bit of an antique quality. For *Captain Fear*, I was just having fun drawing pirates, but it also enabled me to get the coin to the New World.

CH: Your next port of call was DC Western creation Bat Lash. Did you have fun with him?

WS: Bat Lash is the old Sergio Aragonés and Nick Cardy character who appeared in the late '60s in a series of really beautiful comics. I thought Sergio, Denny O'Neil and Nick just did a lovely job. This was the first story I plotted – the first idea I had – and so everything else grew out of it. It's a fairly short story maybe eight or nine pages long, and I totally cribbed Nick's approach: wide panel borders and gutters, and panel borders with curved corners which gave them an old feel.

Nick used an Old West design motif, so I totally cribbed that – and I tried to draw with a little bit of life and a cartoony feel. I tried to get the guns accurate, and the Western outfits and bars. I'm an old *Lieutenant Blueberry* fan, but there's also a series of beautifully drawn French graphic novels by François Boucq, called *The Bouncer*, about a one-armed security agent who guards a bar. So I looked at those – and Giraud's work – just to get a sense of what they did with the Old West.

CH: The penultimate story is the only one that features a well-known DC character...

WS: This story was going to be a standalone graphic novel, as opposed to part of an ongoing series, but I thought it would be commercially wise to give the promotions department at DC *something* to actually promote – because not many guys out there are dying to get the next *Golden Gladiator* story. So I started to consider Two Face, and brought in Batman; that gave me Batman for the cover, and it gave me a character everybody knows. Also Batman became like the Greek chorus of the story – it's really Two Face's story, but Batman is there so the two of them can have a dialogue.

I had so much fun writing Two Face, and the story worked out very well. Because of the grim, Dark Knight idea – that icy quality of Batman. I took a look at newspaper strips. I'm a big fan of a lot of the adventure strips, stuff like [Leonard Starr's] *On Stage* and *Terry And The Pirates*, and in the '70s when James Bond was big – they did a bunch of James Bond strips, some of them drawn by Yaroslav Horak.

Horak did a really beautiful graphic job. It was very clean, an interesting mix of the photographic and the extremely graphic and abstract. Characters weren't drawn out of proportion, but they were very abstractly drawn human beings – and the whole thing had an icy, cold quality. I've loved that stuff for a long time, so when I had a chance to do this story with Two Face and Batman, I went back and looked at Horak's work and thought it could work as an influence. But it was a modern story, and because of that I wanted to enlarge it a bit – so I did it in a newspaper-style format: two long narrow strips per page, so the reader has to turn the book sideways. And in black and white – except for the blood!

CH: The final story features another obscure character – Manhunter 2070...

WS: He's appeared in a couple of oddball comics here and there, but his specific appearance was in DC's *Showcase* magazine, which DC used to try out new characters. In 1970 there were three issues of *Manhunter 2070*, drawn by Mike Sekowsky. It's set 100 years in the future, in a world of flying cars and robot servants – but the stories are very much in the James Bond vein: basically he's a bounty hunter in the Wild West of the future who captures bad guys who escape in spaceships.

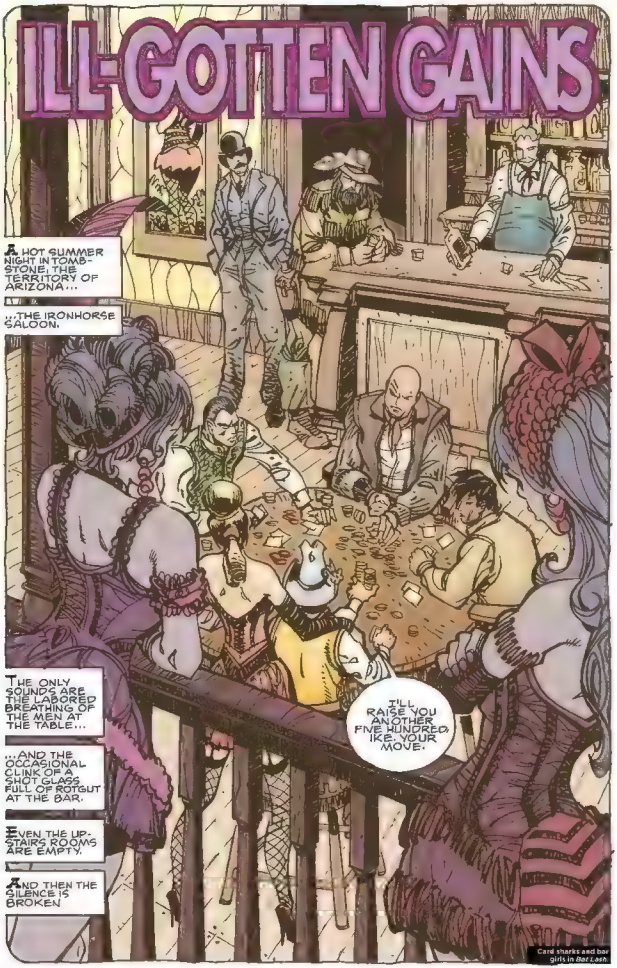
The third issue ended on a cliffhanger, and I think the last episode was called 'Never Trust A Redhaired Greene' – beautiful girls with green skin and bright red hair who were highly untrustworthy! I always enjoyed those comics, they were very straightforward and silly but they were kind of fun, so I decided that was a good place to set a future story.

All of *The Judas Coin* stories ask the question, 'What if Walter was some other kind of artist?' And the *Manhunter* story asks, 'What if Walter were a manga artist?' Partly because – and it may be old fashioned already, because it was a couple of years ago that I was considering this stuff – there was manga that a lot of kids and teenagers were reading with a future quality that I thought fitted. I didn't try to story-tell like manga; instead I broke the story down in as radical a fashion as I could – multiple panel breakdowns, and chopping things up into smaller bits.

All the stories are written with the idea that, as a reader, you don't know who they are. After all, this isn't going to be part of an ongoing series – it's not going to be a giant crossover... so I wanted people to be able to read them without having to be concerned about, 'Who's this guy again?'. That said, this one story *is* actually a pretty direct sequel to that last issue of *Manhunter 2070*.

> **“All of *The Judas Coin* stories ask, ‘What if Walter was some other kind of artist?’”**

The Judas Coin *from DC will be in bookstores on 18 September.*


ILL-GOTTEN GAINS
A HOT SUMMER NIGHT IN TOMBSTONE, THE TERRITORY OF ARIZONA...
...THE IRONHORSE SALOON.
THE ONLY SOUNDS ARE THE LABORED BREATHING OF THE MEN AT THE TABLE...
...AND THE OCCASIONAL CLINK OF A SHOT GLASS FULL OF ROTGUT AT THE BAR.
EVEN THE UPSTAIRS ROOMS ARE EMPTY.
AND THEN THE SILENCE IS BROKEN
I'LL RAISE YOU ANOTHER FIVE HUNDRED, IKE. YOUR MOVE.

Card sharks and bar girls in *Ill-Gotten Gains*

JUDGE JAMES'S COMICS COURTROOM

"Your vagina is haunted!" Rarely has **Judge James Lovegrove** heard such a claim. Yes, it's Jim Balent's *Tarot: Witch Of The Black Rose*...

PROSECUTION: M'lud, what we have before us today is, in essence, a case of misogyny masquerading as female empowerment. *Tarot: Witch Of The Black Rose* is about a young Wiccan, a resident of Salem, Massachusetts, who uses her sword and her spell-casting powers to, as she puts it, preserve the balance between the world of magick and the world of mortals. Yet her principal mission seems to be to wear as little clothing as possible, preferably none at all, pose provocatively, and indulge in all manner of softcore erotic shenanigans.

DEFENCE: As such, she is hardly different from any of the 'bad girl' characters who have lit up the comics scene, most popularly during the mid-'80s to the mid-'90s. Fathom, Avengelyne, Lady Death, Shi like all these and others, Tarot belongs to a noble tradition going back to Frank Miller's Elektra, Warren Publishing's Vampirella, and even earlier. In the '40s and '50s, the subgenre of so-called 'good girl art' focused on attractive, skimpily dressed superheroines, gangsters' molls, movie starlets and the like, who use their sexuality to dominate male characters, and also to stimulate a predominantly male readership. 'Bad girls' display a tougher, more modern attitude. They can handle themselves in a fight and rarely need to be rescued from peril. They are self-determining and self-reliant, with an implicit feminist agenda.

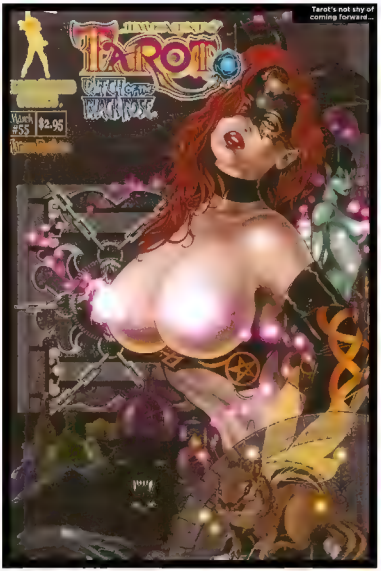
PROSECUTION: Perhaps. Perhaps not. Either way, their creators – almost invariably men – depict them with improbably proportioned anatomies, concentrating particularly on unfeasibly large breasts, and deck them out in outfits that are often little better than exaggerated lingerie. In the very first issue of *Tarot*, our heroine refers to her costume as 'armour', yet it consists of little more than a few scraps of leather, a pair of thigh boots, a horned hat and a glorified G-string. Armour is meant to cover and protect, yet Tarot's does precisely the opposite. And, as the issues go by, she seems to wear it less and less frequently, often going without it at all.

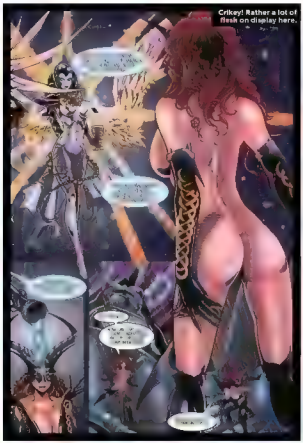
DEFENCE: It would appear that my learned friend has something against the female form. Perhaps he would rather that Tarot and her kind went around draped head-to-toe in a burqa or robed and wimpled like a nun. Tarot herself often gives lectures on how women should not be ashamed of their bodies. "It doesn't matter what size you are," she tells an amateur witch who is bemoaning her own lack of shapeliness "if your breasts are larger or smaller. Or if you are thinner or fluffier. All that matters is that you use the body you have."

Similarly, she often goes 'skyclad', to use the Wiccan term for nudity, because it's appropriate in certain rituals – and because it epitomises a lack of the kind of repression and priggishness often found in orthodox society. I would submit that the prosecution needs to address his own inhibitions before condemning Tarot for her lack of them.

PROSECUTION: Forgive me if I snigger. Tarot is not a role model for women, nor is she a dignified representative for all Wiccans. She is simply a heterosexual man's idealised woman.

One can't help thinking that Balent, who writes, draws and publishes the comic, has an arrested adolescent's view of the opposite sex. Take, for instance, issue #16, in which a baker's gingerbread sex doll is brought to life by some arcane means. It's like the *Fru T Bunn* strip in *Viz*, only without the knowing Hogarthian grotesqueness. Then there's issue





"The objectification and humiliation of women isn't even the worse thing about *Tarot*"

#17, in which Tarot, her sister Raven Hex, a frost fairy and the Frost Queen take it in turns to spank one another. And issue #45, in which Tarot is taken captive, shackled, bent double over a post, and milked like a cow. And...

DEFENCE: Excuse me, your honour, but are you all right? You appear to be perspiring somewhat. I do hope you haven't come down with some kind of bug. May we carry on? We may. Much obliged.

PROSECUTION: I could cite many further examples. But the objectification and humiliation of women isn't even the worst thing about *Tarot: Witch Of The Black Rose*. The comic is just plain dire on every conceivable level. I cite as an example the unintentionally hilarious moment in issue #42 when the ghosts of firefighters killed when the Twin Towers fell defuse a nuclear bomb that is threatening to destroy New York. 'Yeah,' says one, 'you didn't think a little thing like 9/11 was going to stop us from taking care of our home town, did jah?'

DEFENCE: Surely the intent was to honour those brave men and women.

PROSECUTION: But it's done so ham-fistedly it's more insult than tribute. And how about the notorious issue #53? A female phantom returns from beyond the grave to reclaim the collagen that has been extracted from her corpse by a shady plastic surgeon and used to, ahem, rejuvenate a living woman's private parts. "You have to get out of here!" Tarot's boyfriend, the Skeleton Man, urges the unfortunate lady. "Your vagina is haunted!" Of course, given that it's very hard to run away from one's own vagina, how can he expect that fleeing will save her? He doesn't even succeed in preventing the ghost from taking back what was hers, using a spectral scalpel. There can scarcely, in all the history of comics, have been a scene so tasteless and unpleasant. What is Balent saying here? That it's wrong to enhance your body artificially? That revenge is acceptable even when one party is not knowingly culpable of blame? I'm not sure even he knows.

DEFENCE: Let us call *Tarot* schlock, then. Good schlock is enjoyable on its own terms, simply because it does not know it's bad. Balent seems entirely unaware that what he does might be deemed offensive or tacky by some. And - to judge by the rave letters published in the comic's letters column, and the strong sales figures for an independently published comic - many people would seem to share his aesthetic sensibility.

IN THE DOCK NEXT TIME:
Neal Adams' Ms Mystic. *Yes! Neal Adams. He can do no wrong, right! Right?*

BLACK INK, BLACK HUMOUR

A dark, sometimes cruel humour pervades the comics of Jordi Bernet, of *Torpedo* – and now DC's *Jonah Hex* – fame. By Paul Gravett

Better late than never, acclaim across the pond for one of Spain's most prolific and distinctive comics illustrators has finally come – largely thanks to his electrifying renditions of DC Comics' scarred gunman Jonah Hex – as well as a recent story arc on Scott Snyder's *American Vampire*.

But though you may not have known his name before this, Jordi Bernet has actually had a long and fruitful career – not only in his native Spain but across Europe, including in Britain. His magnum opus, with writer Enrique Sánchez Abuí, is the venal killer-for-hire *Torpedo* – sometimes called *Torpedo 1936* – available again from IDW since 2010 in fresh translations, handsome hardbacks and previously untranslated episodes.

FAMILY BUSINESS

Jordi Bernet Cussó was born in Barcelona in 1944. He grew up in a large family and recalls being surrounded by artists. "My earliest memories were playing under my father's drawing board," he says.

His dad, Miguel Bernet Toledano, was also a comics artist, who, under the pen-name 'Jorge', had drawn realistic adventure stories in the '40s, and continued this work for foreign publishers – mainly in South America. Elsewhere in the family, young Jordi's grandfather was a novelist, his four brothers all became fine artists or comics illustrators, and his younger sister eventually worked as one of Spain's most famous film editors. Clearly, Jordi was destined for the art stic life.

As a teenager, his earl est publ cations were jokes, illustrations and one-off strips in Spanish humour magazines, starting with *Pepe Cola* in 1959. But when his father died in 1960, aged only 38, the 15-year-old Jordi quit his business studies course and begged his father's publisher to let him continue the weekly humorous strip, *Doña Urraca*, which his dad had been producing since 1948 for *Pulgarcito*. He promised to stick closely to his father's style but he'd never drawn comics like this before. "It was quite difficult," he admits, "and I did my best in these adverse circumstances."

The strip's simplified, caricatural approach, however, was not Bernet's preferred technique. He aspired to the lush, illustrative realism of the great American newspaper strip artists, above all the contrasting chiaroscuro brushstrokes of Noel Sickles (*Scorchy Smith*), the inspiration of Milton Caniff (*Terry And The Pirates*) and Frank Robbins (*Johnny Hazard*), as well as the work of Catalan artist Joan Junceda, little-known abroad but still honoured in Spain.

Opposite page
The mean back streets of a crime-ridden Depression era New York are beautifully rendered in *Torpedo*

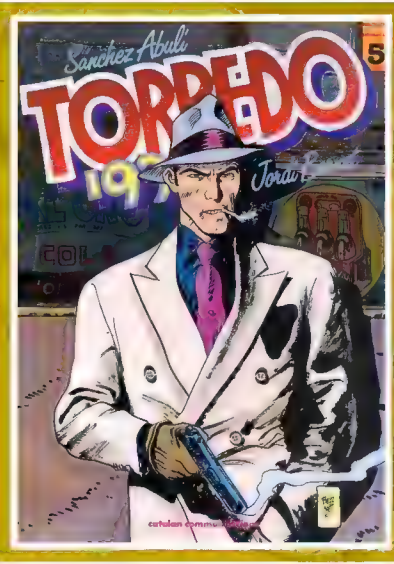
Bernet was taken on by the artists' agency Bardon Art in 1963. They managed to export a Western series entitled *Poncho Yucatan*; keeping it in the family, these were written by his uncle, Miguel Cussó Girait.

Through Bardon Art, Bernet also got assignments for British comics. "I especially remember some stories about Romans," he says, "which were exhausting to produce."

These would have been such historical epics as *Ulysses The Wanderer* and *Lucidus The Spartan* in the boys' weekly *The Victor* for DC Thomson in Dundee. He also worked on *The Town Tamers* and other Westerns, and one issue of their *Commando Picture Library*, #190, entitled 'They Call Him Yellow'. For Odhams and Fleetway in London, he illustrated action heroes such as Rollo Stones and Danny Charters, aka The Legend Testers, in *Smash*, and Jungle Jak in *Lion*.

But Bernet grew disenchanted with the British system. "I never got my original pages back," he says. "That was one of the reasons I quit the British market to move to *Spirou*."

Indeed, the Belgian weekly needed fresh blood in 1968, due to falling sales and the departure of several key artists to rival title *Tintin*. Bernet continued to refine his dramatic black-and-white draughtsmanship on *Spirou*, strongly influenced by *Johnny* »



Hazard artist Frank Robbins, who would became a good friend.

Bernet's principal *Spirou* series were secret agent *Dan Lacombe*, also written by his uncle Cusso, and supernatural investigator *Paul Foran*, though this required them to work uncredited within a Spanish team. In a surprising change of genre in 1972, Bernet and Cusso co-created an erotic humour series, in the sprit of Harvey Kurtzman's *Little Annie Fanny*, for a new German magazine, *Pip International*.

HAVE PEN, WILL TRAVEL

His belated American debut came in 1973, when he drew the Gardner Fox short shocker *Revenge Of The Unliving* for Marvel's monster magazine, *Vampire Tales*. It could have been the start of his American career, but no other commissions followed. Turning back to Germany, Bernet began a three-year, post-apocalyptic series with Cussó.

"The blond hero of *Andrax* was an athlete," he remembers, "who comes back to life after an artificial sleep of 2,000 years to find the Earth has regressed to a state of barbarity. This series quickly became a big success in Germany, but the publisher abruptly left for Brazil, 'forgetting' to return the originals to us. Another bad business!"

Despite these setbacks, the black ink rarely had time to dry on Bernet's drawing board. He made his living working fast, wherever opportunities arose, drawing everything from short Westerns and crime tales – his favourite genres – to over 1,000 pages of *El Cuervo*.

"I always tried to transform these bread-and-butter jobs into something useful for me,' he says, "because that allowed me to experiment and to improve my technique."

By the early '80s, in his native Spain the market for adult comics was exploding. Rafael Martinez, publisher at Norma, wanted Bernet for his new magazine, *Cimoc*, and teamed him in 1981 with writer Antonio Segura on the future fantasy, *Sarvan*, his first major heroine. "It's here," he says, "that I learnt how to move this admirable 'thing', so difficult to draw which is called 'woman'..."

At the same time as he was drawing *Sarvan*, Josep Toutain's publishing house was issuing the Spanish version of *Creepy*. In 1980, Toutain had commissioned the brilliant Alex Toth to draw a new gangster series, written by Enrique Sanchez Abuli.

Toth, however, disagreed with Abuli's conception of the character; he wanted to soften him, and to change some of his dialogue. Abuli objected and Toth quit after two episodes – which were put away in a drawer for a year, until Toutain proposed the project to Bernet. He jumped at the chance, and the series launched in *Creepy* #32 in 1982.

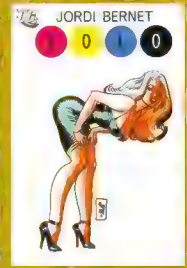
"For me, Torpedo was not so much immoral as amoral," Bernet says. "Morality means nothing to him, he's totally outside of that. I liked the chance to draw a 'wicked' character who is not obliged to die or reform at the each of the episode."

In their lean, mean short stories, narrated in the first person, Abuli and Bernet developed the ruthless world of New York's organised crime during the Great Depression – and the brute survival of Luca Torelli, a Sicilian-born, sharp-dressing, sharp-shooting 'torpedo', or contract killer.

Above left: Luca Torelli, Torpedo's eponymous eagle-eyed gunslinger.

Above right: Scar-faced bounty hunter Jonah Hex does what he does best.

PLEASE, YOU KNOW WHAT YOU WANT
I'LL BASE
LOOK AT THAT BODY! IT'S BEAUTIFUL, BUT...
CAN YOU MAKE IT STOP CRYING?
STOP, KESTRAP
SHUT UP, ASSHOLE!
OF COURSE YOU DON'T
I DO.



❝ I liked drawing a 'wicked' character who is not obliged to die or reform ❞

"Bit by bit, *Torpedo* evolved into a more comical register," he says. "We shifted the mix between violence and humour, which lessened the harshness and ended up almost making our characters sympathetic.'

For reference, Bernet borrowed elements from photos, films and other period sources. "In fact, *Torpedo* reflects our particular tastes. I love American cinema from the '30s and '40s, and jazz and American illustration of the era, while Enrique really loves noir novels. *Torpedo* is a contradictory character – like us!"

Abuli and Bernet were feted internationally for their visceral hitman, which was adapted for the stage, a 25-minute animated film in 1996, and a tribute rock song by Loquillo. A good thing, you might think? Not really. It was this hit record that abruptly broke up their partnership after 15 albums, because an angry Abuli sued everyone involved – including Bernet – for not mentioning his name in the lyrics!

"After 18 years of drawing the series," Bernet says, sadly, "I've developed an atmosphere, characters, a whole world that I love. It's a shame that it ends like this."

Bernet kept busy, though, as other writers stepped in to work with him – including Segura, again, on the nightmarish sewer monster *Kraken*, and Argentina's Carlos Trillo on the futuristic female detective *Custer, Beauty And The Beast* variation *Light And Bold*, sexy Chicago floosie *Chica*, and the weekly striptease gags of *Clara de Noche* (*Betty By Night*).

Then, in 1999, Mark Evanier and Sergio Aragonés invited Bernet to contribute to their DC mini-series *Fanboy*, and, out of this, Mark Chiarello commissioned him to draw an eight-page black-and-white *Batman* story, 'Blackout', written by Howard Chaykin.

The DC door was now open, and occasional jobs came through – notably a whole issue of Charello's *Solo* series, and a *Spirit* episode written by Jimmy Palmiotti. It was Palmiotti, with co-writer Justin Gray, who brought Bernet onto their *Jonah Hex* revival in 2007, a series that perfectly suits his love of the Western genre, and – in particular – the movies of John Ford, Clint Eastwood and Sergio Leone.

A guest at last year's San Diego Comic-Con, Bernet, now 68, has made space in his still-hectic schedule for more twisted tales of 'this ugly-faced, tough Southern bastard'. The ink in his brush is as pitch-black and beautiful as ever.

Above: Bernet proves his prowess with the admirable female form in *Batman, Betty By Night, Kraken* and *Solo*

As well as the various superb ***Torpedo*** *albums, Jordi Bernet's work can be found in such* ***Jonah Hex*** *collections as* ***Origins*** *and* ***Only The Good Die Young****.*

1

Artist Profile

INFO
Gothic graphic – and very British
LOCATION
West Ham
WEBSITE
www.frazerirving.tumblr.com

THE ART OF... Frazer Irving

Bold, rich, gently disturbing images and a keen awareness of colour have made Irving one of our most striking artists. By Joel Meadows

That amazing British institution, *2000 AD*, has been perhaps the world's most potent breeding ground for top artists and writers over the past 30-odd years. It spawned a trio of audacious, arresting and supremely confident artists – Jock, Henry Flint and Frazer Irving – who, despite having an unmistakably British style, have each gone on to have considerable international success.

Irving began his career self-publishing an ambitious graphic novel, but was soon working for *2000 AD*, notably on the high-contrast black and white strip *Necronauts* – a horror mash-up with Charles Fort, HP Lovecraft, Harry Houdini and others battling a supernatural evil – and *Storming Heaven*, a psychedelic superhero story that proved the punch of his painted art, heaving with clashing pinks and turquoises.

America beckoned, of course: Dark Horse, Image, and the Big Two – Marvel and DC – where he's shone in short runs on everything from *Batman* to *Iron Man*. But influenced, as he is, by the outer fringes of mainstream American superhero art – you see a bit of Mike Mignola, or Bernie Wrightson's run on *Swamp Thing* – he seems most at home with the weirder, more freakish heroes: X-Men, sure, but also Marvel's The Inhumans, or teaming up with similarly mainstream-yet-oddball writer Grant Morrison on 2005's rather fine *Seven Soldiers: Klarion The Witch Boy*…

COMIC HEROES: You started out with a graphic novel, *The Man Who Learnt To Fly*, which you published yourself back in 1995.

FRAZER IRVING: That came from a three-page sequence I drew during the summer break at college, part of my plan to explore different forms of storytelling. In that little experiment I drew sex scenes, fight scenes, talking scenes, running scenes – everything I could think of. A year or so later I responded to an advert in the classified section of the UK mag *Comics International*, which was looking for small press creators to contribute to an anthology. I had to cook up a five-page story to submit, and that became the opening sequence for *The Man Who Learnt To Fly*.

CH: You've done quite a lot of work for *2000 AD* – were you were always a fan?

FI: Actually, I never read it as a kid. I was scared off by the violence and weirdness of *Dredd*. I liked superheroes, so I eagerly ate up all the Marvel and DC stuff I could find, especially the X-Men.

CH: That's odd – we always figured you'd be slightly less squeamish, perhaps drawn to the likes of Bernie Wrightson, or EC artists such as Roy Krenkel and Joe Orlando...?

FI: Oddly enough, those dudes have had a very limited influence on my work – folks like Barry Windsor-Smith and John Buscema were way more influential. The mistake many readers make is to think that if one's art resembles the work of another artist, then they must be imitating. I actually dig Richard Corben, Bill Sienkiewicz, Adam Hughes and Monet. My list of influences is a bit of a sausage party – though I'm not sure that demonstrates anything other than how the comics of the past four decades have been dominated by men. These days I find myself looking at a more balanced selection of artists, mostly via the internet. Yay for Tumblr!

CH: Is your art all created digitally these days or do you begin with physical drawings and then move on to the computer?

FI: It's all digital. I start with a document with eight-page-sized rectangles and I scribble thumbnails into those. Then I copy the scribbles into a page document [set up with standard layer groups] and then I draw. There's little routine about it, as I sometimes start with sketching, other times I dive into linework, colour or backgrounds. The pages

Irving Gallery

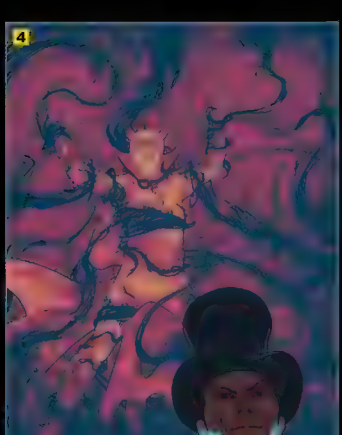
1 Higher Earth cover

"I'm new to the whole cover gig, where one artist does covers for a series while the interior art is done by someone different. I kinda think it's better to have the same art on the inside as well as out – but many of these covers are variants, so I feel less bad. This series was still brewing when I got the gig, so I was left to invent my own scenarios. I started filling in the gaps with my own narrative, building my own story through the covers alone – and, artistically, that's been an immensely rewarding experience."

2 Batman

"*Batman* was always the 'Big Gig' because it was so high profile. When Grant Morrison asked me to draw part of his run on *Batman And Robin* it really put me on the stage. The problem with those characters, though, is that one needs to give them a distinct look. This image happened after my run had ended, and shows signs of the ubiquitous 'Irving mist' which had developed in the meantime. It's the one image of Batman that I feel is properly mine in style, and will be the yardstick by which I measure all the others I do from now on."

2



get 'jammed on', basically, with major elements changing or mutating as I work. It's jazz, baby.

CH: You've worked with Grant Morrison on a number of occasions. What is it about his writing that appeals to you?
FI: He has passion. I've only drawn Grant's *Batman*, for instance. I'm not attracted to characters, just the writer's version of the character and the story they put them in.

CH: As your career in America has taken off, what differences have you found?
FI: There's only one UK company worth mentioning really and that's *2000 AD*/Rebellion. America's a very different beast: the Americans are way more officious and organised about everything, but *2000 AD* has the intimate human touch. They both pay on time.

CH: You've also done cover art for the *Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy* radio series CDs. Are you an admirer?
FI: Not really, I liked the first audio drama, but beyond that it got a bit much for me. I got given the gig because the art director at the time was a fan, but my approach was hampered by, you might say, the 'design ethics' of the company. I ended up just drawing what they asked me to draw, which is the opposite of how I work best.

CH: You did a run on DC's *Xombi* series last year but it seemed to get wrapped up unnaturally early. That must have been frustrating? Do you know if DC has any plans to continue the story?
FI: Actually, I knew it was going to end pretty early on. I got offered other gigs around issue 2, which would have meant ditching the rest of *Xombi* – something I resolutely wouldn't do. After all, if it was only six issues, how mean would it have been to bail halfway through? I actually felt that little story wrapped up beautifully, with John Rozum's writing bringing a tear to my eye by the end. But, to be honest, I don't know what DC thinks about anything – especially *Xombi*!

Irving Gallery

3 Xombi

"Xombi might have been a short-lived series but it encouraged me to experiment more with colour. The subject matter was bizarre, the characters odd, and the writer pretty much let me do what I wanted. After *Batman* I'd decided I needed to lighten up and let the colours speak more."

4 The Shade

"Because I only drew three issues of *The Shade* I felt I had to give it something different, which forced me to do some very odd things with colour layers. It's amazing how little I actually understood about the layers in Photoshop before this... by the end I was armed with twice as many psychedelic effects as when I started, and ready to take them to the next project."

5

Irving Gallery

5 Bedlam

"Another cover-only gig, this was a diversion from my current polychromatic weirdness in that the image has almost no colour at all. I went back to my roots, and treated the whole thing as if it was a pencil/charcoal drawing, scribbling the face with lines and making them do all the work. It's dangerous to become reliant on one specific artistic tool or style, as that one thing can become stale or knotted over time, leaving the creator with a worn out clichéd way of working. Doing this cover was refreshing to the point that, when I returned to the colour stuff, it seemed even more cosmic than before. And this is good!"

6 Gutsville

"A lesson learned the hard way. Some projects are just too big for one's abilities at a given time. When I started *Gutsville* I had a limited range, and the story required more than I could give so it became a mountain in my mind. Due to real life (and money) taking over, the production of *Gutsville* slowed, and I only picked at it for years. This turned out to be a good thing, though, as each episode I drew had more advanced and credible art for it. I still wasn't ready to finish it, but each issue takes a step up and kind of echoes the character development inside, to the point where the final issue will be exactly what I imagined it to be, and a logical resolution to the series as a whole, artistically speaking. I feel that only now am I capable of doing the ending justice."

CH: Still at DC, you've just finished a three-issue stint on *The Shade* series penned by James Robinson. You seem drawn to the darker heroes in comics...

FI: It's not me, it's the editors! They choose me, not the other way round. But I can do dark very easily – I guess it's cathartic, because otherwise my soul is a happy and loveable bouncing turquoise thing. Drawing the dark keeps it that way. Editors seem to see this, and get me in on the moody gigs – a bit like a current project I'm working on, *Masters Of The Universe: The Origin Of Skeletor.*

CH: Finally, do you have ambitions to write as well as draw in the future?

FI: Hell, yes. I've been brewing my own stuff for some time now, but the need to make a quick buck – and the awkward aspect of my stories growing ever larger and more complicated – has been a bit of a spanner in the works. One day!

REVIEWS

Broken Britain: but it looks amazing!

NEW COMICS REVIEWED, RATED, AND ARGUED OVER – SOMETIMES ENDLESSLY

Justice is Served!

Our ratings explained, Spider-chick style

MARY JANE WATSON	★★★★★
GWEN STACY	★★★★
FELICIA HARDY	★★★
BETTY BRANT	★★
DEBRA WHITMAN	★

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COMIC HEROES REVIEWS SPONSORED BY
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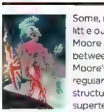
THE LEAGUE OF EXTRAORDINARY GENTLEMEN CENTURY: 2009

Pop-culture skewered, lawsuits dodged, promises kept

WRITER: Alan Moore
ARTISTS: Kevin O'Neill
PUBLISHER: Top Shelf/Knockabout
OUT: Now
★★★★½



Some, it seems, have fallen a little out of love with Alan Moore and his *League* the gap between issues too long, Moore's sour-puss quotes too regular, the adventure story structure of this 'found' superteam's early battles against devil doctors and space invaders too lost, these days, under a cascade of references and showy writing and literary mischief.

We can't say we don't sympathise – we do, kinda – but then along comes each new volume and we fall in love all over again. *The Century Saga* – three books, each of 70 or so pages plus text back-ups that remain a struggle to plough through – is now concluded with *2009*, in which the dregs of the 19th Century League mooch around, make half-hearted attempts to pin down the antichrist they've been pursuing for the past 100 years, and are eventually saved by a deus ex machina so outrageous you just have to clap and cheer.

Until this glorious back-of-a-fag-packet conclusion, *2009* is fittingly half arsed as a thrill ride – nobody does very much, the whole concept of adventure feeling worn out and betrayed – while the still-copious references seem gaumphing and random in a way they never have before. Sure, this serves one of *Century*'s central theses (basically modern entertainment is crap), but it achieves it only by wilfully ignoring so much good stuff.

Hey-ho. Despite all this, much here really works: Orlando the war veteran; the Avengers girls running the SIS; all this what's-the-point? hair washing and watching TV, Kevin O'Neill is in his pomp here, particularly with a ruined Hogwarts and the six-page final battle. Moore's playfulness, so often missing from the mix when his diatribes are quoted in black and white, is constantly apparent too: why else have a shaggy-bearded chap called 'Allan' run from his old friends shouting, "I don't do that stuff any more. Leave me alone!", scattering ruined magazines as he goes? It's a triumph then, but a particularly sad and anti-climactic one.

Familiar faces abound, as per in a league.

Not a very happy house...

Despite Moore's done-with-comics stance, there's more to come: first, a number of shorter tales exploring the unvisited crannies of *League* history – before year's end we should see a '20s-set one-shot *Nemo: Heart of Ice* – and then the next epic, somewhere down the line (*We're* hoping for the far future.) **Matt Bielby**

Government thug Eddie.

Adrian Veidt: no ordinary man.

Ursula kicks ass in *Minutemen*.

AND LASHED OUT WITH MY RIGHT FOOT-
CATCHING JERRY SQUIRE ALONG THE SIDE OF HIS RIGHT KNEECAP-!
AND SHATTERING IT
AAGG HHHH!
JERRY COLLAPSED IN A FETAL BALL, CLUTCHING HIS RUINED KNEE, MEWLING AND AN INFANTILE
AND AS I SEE HOW I DEAL WITH LIFE'S MORE VICIOUS KICKS
I'VE NEVER LIKED SOMETHING LIKE WATCHMEN WITHOUT YOU CHOOSE YOU WANT TO MAKE A MISTAKE
MISTAKES ARE FROM UNDERSTANDING.
I HAVE GOOD UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT I'M DOING.
Leo's art saves *Ozymandias*.

BEFORE WATCHMEN

Some debate 'the morality' of this project; we'd rather consider the books themselves...

MINUTEMEN
WRITER/ARTIST: Darwyn Cooke
OUT: Now
★★★

SILK SPECTRE
WRITER: Darwyn Cooke
ARTIST: Amanda Conner
OUT: Now
★★★½

COMEDIAN
WRITER: Brian Azzarello
ARTIST: JG Jones
OUT: Now
★★½

NITE OWL
WRITER: J Michael Straczynski
ARTISTS: Andy & Joe Kubert
OUT: Now
★★½

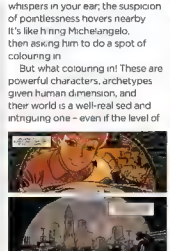
OZYMANDIAS
WRITER: Len Wein
ARTIST: Jae Lee
OUT: Now
★★★★

Let's put the baggage to one side: this is not a piece about the rights or wrongs of *Before Watchmen*, but about the books themselves. How do they read? What do they look like? Do they add anything to the rich tapestry and world-building of the original *Watchmen*, still the most ambitious and complete superhero story ever told?

And, perhaps more importantly is there somewhere to go from here? *Before Watchmen*, you have to suspect, is not only an event, it's also a toe in the water. Top-load these prequels with creative talent – and it's certainly an A-list bunch involved, some of them doing career-best work – and see what takes, if people like them, then the trickier (but infinitely more intriguing) prospect of 'Beyond Watchmen' raises its head.

But to the existing titles, the thing at hand. Overall, you have to say that these books, so far, are impressive, well-crafted, fun to read – and slightly dead, like fish on a slab. Nothing really sticks with you afterwards, deja vu whispers in your ear, the suspicion of pointlessness hovers nearby. It's like hiring Michelangelo, then asking him to do a spot of colouring in.

But what colouring in! These are powerful characters, archetypes given human dimension, and their world is a well-realised and intriguing one – even if the level of invention and 'alternative universe-ness' of the original *Watchmen* has been dialled well back here.



KEEPING WATCH

It's all suitably *Watchmen* on the surface: yellow-and-black vertical logos; nine-panel grids often toyed with (if never adhered to); moody colouring. Clocks crop up, and views straight down from the tops of buildings: there are snow globes, and masked wannabe rapists, familiar panels reproduced or referenced. Sadness and regret permeates all of it, very much as with the original, but making less sense here (these are the glory days we're looking at, after all).

First up, *Minutemen*, from the always-excellent Darwyn Cooke, and a take on this universe's first superheroes. There's lovely stuff here – the red backgrounds of a Hooded Justice sequence, the fabulous period feel throughout – but already the universe feels slightly off. This Nite Owl and Silhouette leap around like Daredevil, physical feats that

WADING THROUGH PUREED DADDY ISSUES AND A LOT OF SHOUTY BRAINS UNDERFOOT...
HEAD MAN FABER'S YOUR CHRISTOPHER LIGHTFOOT!
A 10 WHAT INTELLECTUAL MAGNIFICENCE THIS STORY HAS!
OTOLEMN! MY HEAD! THE TWIN PYRAMIDS OF LIGHTHOUSE AT PHAROS
BEAUTIFUL! WORDS CANNOT DESCRIBE YOUR GRIM SHADOWS
I'VE NEVER HAD A SINGLE ORIGINAL THOUGHT IN MY LIFE, SO I'M PRETENDING TO BE SOMEONE WHO'S NOW NOT EVEN ME
I'M TORN APART BY SOCIAL FORCES BEYOND MY CONTROL, BUT STILL MANAGE TO REMAIN QUIRKY AND ALIVE WITH YOUR CHARMING, CAMBERWELL

just shouldn't be possible in the *Watchmen* universe.

Silk Spectre is more grounded and with its occasional cartoonish moments of anger or ecstasy, adds something new to the visual language of *Watchmen*. When we talk about 'career best' work, by the way, Amanda Conner is one we're thinking of. Time was when women drawing superhero books – not comics in the wider sense, of course – was virtually unheard of. Conner has helped to change all that, and her restraint, storytelling and way with a face all sing here. It's glorious stuff.

Less glorious is *Comedian*: the ugly, knowing, gleefully immoral government thug – seen only in flashback in the original – makes for a charismatic but unappealing lead, and his adventures are the sort of thing done far better in Garth Ennis' *Punisher* and *Nick Fury* tales. Brian Azzarello's painfully arch, convoluted dialogue – so powerful in his everyone-s-posturing crime series *100 Bullets* – so painful elsewhere – dominates, and JG Jones' static but attractive art fails to reference the original *Watchmen* in any way, the look of Eddie 'The Comedian' Blake aside.

Nite Owl is pleasing – the art by a Kubert father-and-son tag team particularly – but largely forgettable except for the slight cringe factor of JMS attempting Rorschach's "hurm"-heavy dialogue.

And then there's *Ozymandias*, one of the trickiest characters to pull off (remember the film?) without him seeming either laughable or a total prick, but handled masterfully here. Len Wein's script is so voiceover heavy it's virtually a picture book, but that normally disastrous choice is made genius by the way artist Jae Lee has approached the thing. this is something *genuinely* different.

> **"Sadness and regret permeates all of it; very much as with the original"**

But it around a circular panel motif – sometimes central, sometimes bleeding off the side of the page – Lee turns every sequence into an art deco splash page. This is Tim Burton fairytale storytelling with a cold, driven genius at its centre.

In that *Ozymandias* does it's own thing, and surprises with every page, it's the best of these books by a mile. And when the most ropey, unimaginative artists are sung as minor superstars, Lee reminds you of the power of an inventively rendered page. Bravo, sir.

PIRATE COPY

With modern comics demanding such a financial commitment, it's to *Before Watchmen*'s credit that it attempts to add a degree of value. Most issues here are $3.99 a pop (hefty, sure, but an industry standard) and you tend to get a page or two more of strip than with most comics. Plus, every issue has the two-page ongoing serial *The Curse Of The Crimson Corsair* as back-up, a doom-laden pirate tale by original *Watchmen* editor Len Wein and colourist John Higgins. It looks lovely, but adds very little; the similar *Tales Of The Black Freighter* in the original *Watchmen* slowed that right down to a snail's pace, but at least commented on the central action. Here it's just a fun reference, so far – an expensive, glossy play in the sandbox that adds nothing. (Hmm. So maybe it is a sly commentary on the whole thing after all...?)

So, where do we stand with it? Well, not regretting having leapt on board for one thing – but though there's lots to enjoy here, it's all based on craft (and, to a lesser degree, residual affection for this world) rather than anything particularly compelling about this project itself. No *story* has emerged, no reason to worry about missing an issue. It's just... nice.

Meanwhile, prejudices are confirmed. Cooke struggles to move away from the light and fantastical, Straczynski should stop trying to make jokes, Azzarello should relax, quit trying so hard. And then there's Jae Lee and Amanda Conner, we'll take their names away from this too. They're not new, they have solid fan bases. But they both just became superstars. **Matt Blelby**

MARVEL ROUND-UP

The *AvX* juggernaut rumbles on, plus a double-bill of wall-crawlers and an all-new Cap Marve

AVENGERS VS X-MEN
WRITERS: Jason Aaron, Brian Michael Bendis, Ed Brubaker, Matt Fraction & Jonathan Hickman
ARTISTS: Adam Kubert & John Dell
OUT: Now
★★★★

SPIDER-MEN
WRITER: Brian Michael Bendis
ARTIST: Sara Pichelli
OUT: Now
★★★

AVENGING SPIDER-MAN
WRITER: Kelly Sue DeConnick
ARTISTS: Terry & Rachel Dodson
OUT: Now
★★★★

CAPTAIN MARVEL
WRITER: Kelly Sue DeConnick
ARTIST: Dexter Soy
OUT: Now
★★★

X-TREME X-MEN
WRITER: Greg Pak
ARTIST: Steven Segovia
OUT: Now
★★★

Last year Marvel head honcho Axel Alonso told *Comic Heroes* that the House of Ideas' sales suffered in 2010 when it took 12 months off from the customary summer crossover

Now, if you compare *Avengers Vs X-Men* – this year's blockbuster event-to-end-all-blockbuster events – to DC's much-trumpeted *Before Watchmen*, you have to wonder who will be the eventual winner when these marathon projects enter the home straight

A superpowered extravaganza, akin to every fanboy's biggest dreams coming true all at once, it's essentially a 12-issue-long smackdown between its two main superteams. Meanwhile, despite some outstanding art by the likes of Jae Lee and Darwyn Cooke, the lustre has quickly worn off *Before Watchmen* as readers realise that nothing actually *happened* before *Watchmen*

But that's not to say *AvX* is merely about Colossus beating up Spider-Man, or the Red Hulk tussling with Sub Mariner (although that happens, in *spades*), as this tightly-plotted story is full of double crosses, divided loyalties and marital disputes (in the case of Black Panther and Storm's, a sudden annulment)

With the virtually godlike Cyclops, Emma Frost, Namor, Colossus and Magick now based in a Miracleman-esque utopia in the sky after absorbing the vengeful Phoenix Force at the end of the first act, #6's second arc 'No More Avengers' boasts some genuine surprise twists – and with Professor Xavier having now entered the fray, it will be interesting to see how this bitter skirmish between Earth's Mightiest Heroes and the not-so-Merry Mutants plays out.

FAMILY AFFAIR

After the dynamic vistas of Jon Romita Jr's opening five issue stint, Olivier Coipel's ornate precision provided a fitting contrast for an all too brief two issues before making way for Adam Kubert's brash linework from *Avengers Vs X-Men* #8 onwards. With his legendary father Joe Kubert and brother Andy currently playing tag team on *Before Watchmen's Nite Owl* mini-series, this must surely be the first occasion that three members of the same family have contributed to two opposing high profile comics at the same time

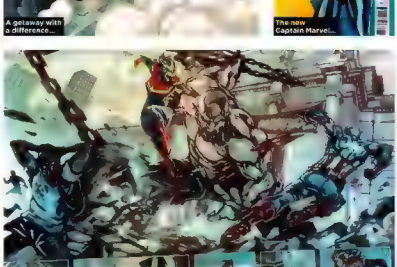
But *Avengers Vs X-Men* is not Marvel's only marquee release of the past few months. Just in time for *Amazing Spider-Man*'s nifty cinematic reboot, and Peter Parker's 50th comic book anniversary, the main Marvel Universe wall-crawler and Ultimate web-spinner Miles Morales have joined forces in *Spider-Men*

It's a team-up that Marvel swore blind would never happen, but with Brian Michael Bendis conjuring up his usual brisk, witty script and Sara Pichelli proving that she can draw the adult Peter as impressively as teenage Miles, we can forgive them any transgression

With Peter propelled into the Ultimate Universe when one of chief villain Mysterio's fancy contraptions short circuits, Bendis neatly establishes the two characters as distinct personalities, with Miles coming across as a quieter presence compared to Peter's typical motormouth patter

While the bumbling (but nevertheless sinister) Mysterio provides a formidable threat, *Spider-Men*'s real drama is in the emotional moments, particularly

ALTHOUGH IF THIS CITY WAS A REAL WORLD, I'D DATE HER.
BUT IF THE CITY WAS A REAL SPY, SHE WOULD
OUT OF THE FRYING PAN
AND INTO THE FIRE



“Spider-Men’s real drama is in the emotional moments”

Peter’s first encounter with Ultimate Aunt May and Gwen Stacy, which will bring a tear to the strongest eye. Now if only Andrew Garfield’s Spidey could meet Tobey Maguire’s webhead, that would be a Marvel team-up to remember!

Over in *Avenging Spider-Man*, Peter is helping to usher in the new Captain Marvel, the latest incarnation of Carol Danvers the erstwhile Ms Marvel/Warbird, etc.

Releasing *Avenging Spider-Man* #9’s first-of-two-parts a week before *Captain Marvel* #1’s bold new direction makes for some confusing plot developments, although it probably gives the debuting book a valuable fillip.

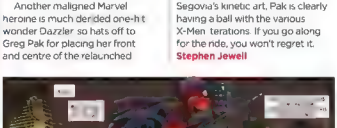
Beginning with Carol and Spidey’s flight from New York to Boston being interrupted by a jetpacking bank robber, DeConnick weaves an engaging yarn that boasts some wry connections to the Occupy movement. Giving Spidey a run for his money in the chatterbox stakes, Robyn proves to be a worthy addition to the Marvel canon and is depicted with usual aplomb by the incomparable Terry and Rachel Dodson. In contrast *Captain Marvel* #1 itself is something of a slow burner. After a cursory battle between Captain America, the then-Ms Marvel and the Absorbing Man, Carol assumes the late Mar-Vell’s mantle. DeConnick cracks a few sardonic quips about the status of female superheroes in the Marvel U, and harks back to Carol’s past as she lays some promising seeds that could bear fruit in future issues.

Compared to Dodson’s clean lines, though, Dexter Soy’s manga-esque art is an awkward fit that isn’t helped by the garish colours. But whatever she chooses to call herself, Carol deserves her own monthly title, so hopefully readers will give *Captain Marvel* a chance to get off the ground.

Another maligned Marvel heroine is much derided one-hit wonder Dazzler so hats off to Greg Pak for placing her front and centre of the relaunched *X-Treme X-Men*, even if she is noticeably absent from the first issue cover. Content to live off her (admittedly short) past glories, he brings a bit of Zooey Deschanel’s self-deprecating *New Girl* humour to Alison Blaire. After an amusing encounter with a tribute act to herself her sound based superpowers inadvertently propel her into the grim alternate dimension that Pak previously visited during his *Astonishing X-Men* run earlier this year. Alongside the likes of a truly impish Kid Nightcrawler she’s tasked by one of Professor X’s severed heads with assassinating several of his all powerful counterparts.

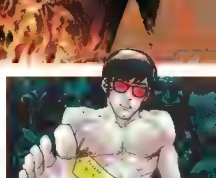
Well supported by Steven Segovia’s kinetic art, Pak is clearly having a ball with the various X-Men iterations. If you go along for the ride, you won’t regret it.

Stephen Jewell



Animal Man and Swamp Thing unite.

Batman #11: it's time for the big, bad reveal!


Cool Kid Eternity takes centre stage.

DC ROUND-UP

An epic end for the *Batman* arc, plus the build up to 'Rotworld'

BATMAN
WRITER: Scott Snyder
ARTISTS: Greg Capullo & Jonathan Glapion
OUT: Now
★★★★

SWAMP THING
WRITER: Scott Snyder
ARTISTS: Marco Rudy, Yanick Paquette, Dan Green & Andy Owens
OUT: Now
★★★★

ANIMAL MAN
WRITER: Jeff Lemire
ARTIST: Steve Pugh
OUT: Now
★★★★

JUSTICE LEAGUE DARK
WRITER: Jeff Lemire
ARTIST: Mikel Janin
OUT: Now
★★★★

NATIONAL COMICS: KID ETERNITY
WRITER: Jeff Lemire
ARTISTS: Cully Hamner & Derick Donovan
OUT: Now
★★★★

While *The Avengers* dominated the heady early days of summer, July – the business end of the blockbuster cinema season – belonged to the Caped Crusader.

For any newcomers seeking to explore some source material now that Christopher Nolan's epic cinematic trilogy has come to a close, it's a testimony to the success of the New 52's veritable clean slate that there is currently no better entry point to the Dark Knight's comic book adventures than the flagship *Batman* title itself.

Along with a touch of Frank Miller's *Dark Knight Returns* and a devilish debt to Grant Morrison's brilliantly esoteric run on various Bat books, *The Dark Knight Rises* also boasts echoes of the insidious political intrigue that Scott Snyder's Gotham residency has been steeped in since the *American Vampire* creator assumed the reins of *Detective Comics* in late 2011.

Shifting across to *Batman* with the advent of the New 52 last September, Snyder has gradually constructed a thrillingly labyrinthine storyline over the past 11 issues. Like all good Bat stories, The Court Of Owls' has really been all about Gotham itself, as the sinister role that the titular clandestine society has played in the city's hidden history is gradually uncovered, enticing layer by layer. Exposing yet more Wayne family secrets and a devastating shock revelation in the form of the scheming Lincoln March's true identity, *Batman* #11's enthralling finale inevitably poses more questions than it actually answers.

But with The Joker waiting in the wings, Snyder provides plenty of reasons to come back for more, especially with the excellent Greg Capullo – who draws a mean Batmobile – in the form of his life.

ARCANE ADVENTURE

Along with Batman, Snyder has also been responsible for overseeing *Swamp Thing*'s return to the main DCU after spending more than a decade as part of Vertigo's mature readers stable.

Cleverly harking back not just to Alan Moore's historic run but also Len Wein and Marty Pasko's earlier definitive stints, Snyder has not just cast new light on the muck monster's human alter ego, Alec Holland, he's also brought out some previously unseen qualities in the ever-tormented Abby Arcane – and more disturbingly resurrected her evil uncle Anton, in what seems to be his most horrific state yet.

For the past year, Snyder has been building up to 'Rotworld,' a crossover with his good pal Jeff Lemire's equally impressive *Animal Man*, which has proved to be one of the New 52's unexpected hits. Along with a sly nod to the kaleidoscopic meta-fiction of Grant Morrison's radical '80s reinvention of the character, Lemire emphasises the deepening conflict between Buddy Baker's opposing roles as both a superhero and a father, ratcheting up the tension between him and his wife Ellen as they and their children, Cliff and

“Jeff Lemire must surely be the breakout star of the New 52”

Maxine, are placed in increasingly perilous situations, as all hell erupts around them.

According to the authors, October's crossover grew naturally out of similar storylines in both books, and that organic process is clearly evident in *Swamp Thing* #12 and *Animal Man* #12's seamless two-part prologue. After finally crossing paths, the two elemental heroes rashly venture into the Rot's fetid netherworld on the tail of the rampant Arcane. Sharing scripting duties, Snyder and Lemire build up a feisty rapport between not just the central protagonists but also supporting characters like Abby, Ellen, and Maxine's mystical puddy-tat, Socks. And while first Yanick Paquette and latterly Mel Rubi's fractured layouts pay heartfelt tribute to Steve Bissette and John Totleben's iconic Swampy spreads, long-time *Animal Man* artist Steve Pugh's explosive gothic surrealism is an ideal replacement for the departed Travel Foreman's unsettling body horror. Considering the devastating consequences of the pair's impetuous actions, two months seems too long to wait for 'Rotworld: The Red Kingdom' to begin properly, with September's zero issues dedicated to the characters' respective origins.

DARK ARTS

With *Animal Man* soaring in the sales charts, Jeff Lemire must surely be the breakout star of the New 52, making him an inspired choice to succeed Peter Milligan on *Justice League Dark*. After Milligan's promising opening gambit centring on an increasingly insane Shade, the Changing Man, Lemire ups the ante and adds *Black Orchid* and *I, Vampire*'s Andrew Bennett to the ranks of the spooky black-ops collective, who are temporarily allied with Steve Trevor's US military agency, Argus.

Placing John Constantine at the heart of a far-reaching supernatural conspiracy involving an all-powerful Felix Faust, a nostalgic visit to the House of Mystery and some fiendish double crosses, Lemire cleverly brings back yet another '90s Vertigo mainstay in the shape of *The Books Of Magic* (and eventually DC)'s proto-Harry Potter, Tim Hunter himself. All of which is excellently illustrated by the seriously underrated Mikel Janin, who deftly combines such disparate influences as Howard Chaykin and Geoff Darrow with some dynamic storytelling. Has old Conjob finally hoodwinked himself? Can't wait to find out!

Jeff Lemire has also penned the first issue of new one-shot series *National Comics*, which sees Kid Eternity making a welcome return to the fore.

Now working as a police pathologist-cum-ghost detective in New York City, the terminally late Christopher Freeman uses his preternatural ability to bring the dead back for a day to crack outstanding homicide cases.

Literally haunted by his deceased father, the hapless Chris attempts to solve an apparently routine shoot-ing before the ominous emergence of the mysterious Keeper suggests that this deceptively simple tale could have definite repercussions.

Maybe Kid Eternity will join *Justice League Dark*'s motley band? But with Rob Williams and Trevor Hairsine reuniting for the first time since *Cla$$war* a decade ago on October's *Madame X*, and Ian Edington and Mike S Miller taking on *Looker* while Tom Taylor and Neil Google tackle *Rose & Thorn*, the best of National Comics could be yet to come.

Stephen Jewell

THE HOLE OF TANK GIRL

Our favourite delinquent in full.

WRITER: Alan Martin
ARTIST: Jamie Hewlett
PUBLISHER: Titan Books
OUT: 28 September
★★★★

Okay, so this is £75 – yes, it's a handsome volume; yes, it comes in a fancy slipcase, yes, each issue is signed by Alan Martin, *Tank Girl* writer and co-creator. But even so, eh? In terms of extras and unexpected elements it's kind of disappointing too: Hewlett contributes the cover, his first bit of new *TG* artwork (and never has she looked less sexy, more Gorillaz) in an age, and some sketchbook stuff, but apart from these – and a few old interviews and bits of script – there's not too much unexpected stuff here.

Doesn't matter, for the strips are the thing: funny, lyrical, romantic, violent – and developing and mutating at quite a lick. *Tank Girl* came out of early fanzine stuff, but dominated *Deadline* magazine from the off: we get all the Hewlett/Martin strips here, from early battles with kangaroos back when she was still a Mad Max-type in the Australian desert through English idyll such as 'Summer Love Sensation' to more ambitious, later-period fare like 'Blue Helmet'.

With retrospect – like with the Sex Pistols being played at the Olympics – the 'shock' stuff seems even more gentle and cartoonish than it did at the time, the sweetness shining through. **Matt Bielby**

THE JUDAS COIN

WRITER/ARTIST: Walter Simonson
PUBLISHER: DC
OUT: Now
★★★★

Walter Simonson has been a mainstay of mainstream American comics since the '70s, working on everything from *Thor* – a truly masterful run – to *Orion*, *Fantastic Four* to *Elric*. It's been a remarkable career – but *The Judas Coin* is probably the most ambitious single work he's ever attempted: an original graphic novel built of six stories and featuring a selection of obscure DC characters from across the centuries – plus Batman – all linked by an ancient coin, one of Judas Iscariot's 30 pieces of silver.

It starts in the Roman era with *Golden Gladiator*, moves to the Dark Ages with the *Viking Prince*, then on to pirate action with *Captain Fear*. The coin then finds its way to the Americas, and into the hands of fast-talking cowboy gambler Bat Lash.

Later, it encounters Two Face and Batman in modern-day Gotham City, and finally it is seen in the future, cropping up in a *Manhunter 2070* tale.

Simonson has always been one of our most talented comic creators – his storytelling impeccable, his art distinctive, his writing never less than solid – and *The Judas Coin* shows off his virtues to rare effect.

Visually, of course, it's a knock-out. Walt's always been good at world-building, and especially at depicting ancient cultures, and almost every story here sings: the *Viking Prince* and the *Captain Fear* tales should be singled out for singular praise, but there's a beauty and elegance to all of the episodes here.

Only the *Manhunter 2070* story doesn't quite work for us – but in an era where risk-taking appears to be all-but-gone in the comics mainstream, it's heartening to know that we still have Walter Simonson, his clear love of comics and his willingness to display it in such a handsome 96-page love letter to the four-colour world.

In all, a must-buy for anyone who wants to see just how far the comics format can be pushed – and for the many fans of Simonson's sizeable canon. **Joel Meadows**

An epic journey through time.

THE NAO OF BROWN

Glyn Dillon is back with a bang...

WRITER/ARTIST: Glyn Dillon
PUBLISHER: Self Made Hero
OUT: September
★★★★★

Mixing an appealing cool-kids-in-love storyline with a thoughtful, informed look at mental illness, then candy-coating the result with impressive, inventive levels of detail – a believable, yet largely fictitious, background of Japanese geek culture, a real sense of place – *The Nao Of Brown* is right up there, one of the very best comics we've seen this year.

That this marks a return to comics for Glyn Dillon (briefly of Vertigo and *Deadline* many moons ago, and younger brother to the more famous Steve) makes it all the more remarkable, for few things we've read lately have been anywhere near as ambitious or well-realised. Hardcore fanboys will love the snappy, inventive storytelling and to-die-for heroine, but the potential appeal extends well beyond 'our' world and out into the real (not comics) mainstream newspapers will review it, Posy Simmons fans will love it, and I wouldn't be surprised if the odd book group takes it on board.

This is an indie movie on paper. Nao is half-English/half-Japanese, a struggling artist in her early twenties and a posh vinyl toy designer working in a cool west London shop and drinking with her buddies, notably, her boss clearly a fan, and a less immediately likeable washing machine repair guy who reminds her of a favourite manga character.

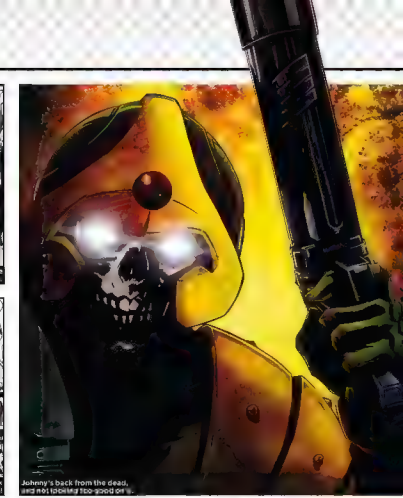
Hidden deep below her winning surface quite serious OCD manifesting itself in obsessive behaviour and homicidal fantasies – from the off, we worry for this girl. Also intriguing: extensive extracts from a fictional manga Nao loves, one that tells of a strange conker-headed tree-boy and is littered with mask imagery.

The result is gorgeous-looking – if London has ever looked more London-like in comics, I've not seen it – and intriguing, it's the art that'll have people going, 'Where has Glyn Dillon been all my life?', but he exhibits serious writing chops here too. In a world where the American mainstream sticks rigidly to five-panel pages and bantering sub-Whedon dialogue, and where indie comics are so often plodding and worthy, *The Nao Of Brown* provides a middle ground that's like a breath of fresh air. It's also full of confident, well-thought-through storytelling. Never have I seen the sensation of falling represented on paper as well as it is here, and rarely has rain looked so good. Elsewhere, Nao reads a book – and we get two POV spreads of almost solid text, framed by her hands holding the thing. It's kinda masterful.

Imperfections? Oh, sure. I'm not convinced the ending's as strong as the rest of it, but your mileage may differ. What I *am* sure of though, is this: *The Nao Of Brown* will cause quite a stir. And I won't be the only one eagerly waiting for whatever it is Dillon opts to do next. **Matt Bielby**

Shades of the Krays in *Savage*.

Bill adopts the Clark Kent disguise: glasses!


Johnny's back from the dead, and not looking too good on it.

2000 AD ROUND-UP

Alpha and Savage continue their returns...

STRONTIUM DOG
THE LIFE AND DEATH OF JOHNNY ALPHA: THE PROJECT
WRITER: John Wagner
ARTIST: Carlos Ezquerra
OUT: Now
★★★½

SAVAGE: THE GUV'NOR
WRITER: Pat Mills
ARTIST: Patrick Goddard
OUT: Now
★★★½

One of *2000 AD*'s many purposes, of course, is to pump fresh young blood and ideas into the industry, but the comic has always been anchored by a handful of – shall we say? – much more seasoned pros, a backbone very much led by the two writers here. Wagner, of course, is the father of *Judge Dredd*, Mills was daddy of the entire comic, and both know the impact a tough guy with a big gun can have – especially if surrounded by an intriguing supporting cast, strong villains and a varied, surprising backdrop.

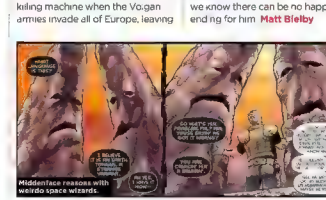
Strontium Dog first the mutant bounty hunter from a far-future Britain, who fought anti-mute prejudice at home and enjoyed Western-style adventure amongst the stars. Johnny Alpha began in 1978's short-lived *Starlord* comic, but quickly earned a transfer to *2000 AD*, where he's been a fixture ever since.

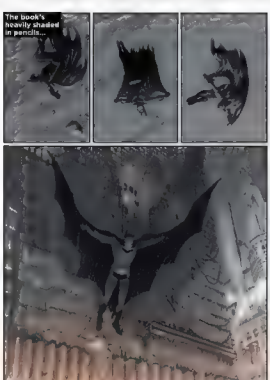
Or almost. Alpha was killed off in 1990, but remained so popular that strips starring his supporting cast cropped up throughout the following decade, with Alpha himself returning in a series of prequel tales by series creators Wagner and Carlos Ezquerra from 1999 on. Good enough? Not quite, with creators and fans alike seeming y demanding a 'proper resurrection'. Johnny actually rose from the grave in the stones contained here: "The Life And Death Of Johnny Alpha", in which sometime partner Middenface McNulty a heavy-drinking, hard fighting Scottish mutant – and hot, pink-haired reporter Precious Matson uncover the truth about what *really* happened to Johnny, and sequel 'The Project', in which a resurrected Alpha returns to Earth uncovers yet *another* final solution to the mute problem, and tangles with rogue Search/Destroy agents (a particularly strong bit of character design from Ezquerra).

Strontium Dog's Robin Hood-goes-Spaghetti Western vibe is very much to the fore here, the plots complicated but not overly so, the action sequences inventive and the strip's sometimes silly sense of humour still very much part of the mix. Johnny, it's good to have you back.

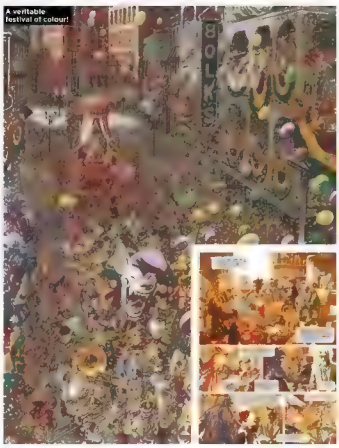
Meanwhile, Pat Mills has in recent years revived one of *2000 AD*'s launch characters – the very blood-and-thunder Bill Savage, one-time lorry driver turned Punisher-style killing machine when the Volgan armies invade all of Europe, leaving America to quiver across the Atlantic and Ireland to take on Britain's WW2 potential-staging-post-for-a-retake role. Rendered in stark, gritty black-and-white (initially by Charlie '*Walking Dead*' Adlard, now by Patrick Goddard), these adventures are a heady mix of *V For Vendetta* and *Harry's Game*, with Bill an increasingly intriguing figure: freedom fighter, terrorist, instigator and stooge.

There's plenty of action and adventure – Mills is now explicitly dragging his entire *Robusters/ABC Warriors/Nemesis* continuity into the thing, making for the odd juxtaposition of war robots with the general atmosphere of '80s Ulster – and oodles of moral grey; indeed, though by the end of these three storylines, an American expeditionary force appears to have established itself at Fishguard, Bill's hands are so blood-soaked we know there can be no happy ending for him. **Matt Bielby**


Middenface reasons with weirdo space wizards.



...with last a few splashes of colour.
CRAAA



BLACKSAD: A SILENT HELL

WRITER: Juan Díaz Canales
ARTIST: Juanjo Guarnido
PUBLISHER: Dark Horse
OUT: Now
★★★★★

By anyone's reckoning, it should be a disaster. A series of 50s-set private eye adventures featuring anthropomorphic animals? And serious too? Not played for laughs? Don't be daft.

The triumph of *Blacksad* is not simply that it works, but that it works so brilliantly. Much of this is down to the skilful use to which Díaz Canales puts his conceit. Not only is each character a certain type of animal, but he or she exhibits all of that animal's attributes, personally as well as physically. Blacksad himself, a tough-guy investigator, is a black-and-white cat with a fine cool and the instincts of a back-alley tom. His sidekick, tabloid journalist Weekly, is fittingly a weasel. Here, the two of them travel to New Orleans at the request of a record company bigwig, a goat whose star artiste, jazz pianist and heroin addict Sebastian, a pug, has gone missing. Naturally they uncover more secrets than they bargained for – or is good for their health.

The plot is twisty, tight and beautifully constructed, and you'll be salivating over Guarnido's watercolour art. There's a touch of Uderzo about his figure work, especially his vampish women, whose figures are so sexy you can't believe they're just ink on a page – but there's also a cushiness and a delicacy that make each panel sing. His period detail is superb, his use of colour match ess, and h s characterisation spot-on. You owe it to yourse f to read this – and a so the first three *Blacksad* tales. **James Lovegrove**

CREEPY PRESENTS: RICHARD CORBEN

WRITERS: Various
ARTIST: Richard Corben
PUBLISHER: Dark Horse
OUT: Now
★★★★

Creepy, the delirious y gory Silver Age horror anthology magazine, played host to strips drawn by some of comics' finest, among them Frank Frazetta, Bernie Wrightson and Alex Toth. When Richard Corben joined that roster in the late '60s, he was already an established underground comix artist with a pungent but unrefined techn que. In the eight years he contributed to *Creepy*, and its companion *Eerie*, he developed into an illustrator of great sophisticat on.

Here are al 40 of the stories he produced dur ng that t me, and they demonstrate Corben's progress from a loose cartoony style to the heavily stipp ed photorealism he's best known for. This hefty tome also shows off, in the full-colour strips and covers, his mastery of tone and shading.

The scripts, written by diverse hands such as Doug Moench, Bill DuBay and Gerry Conway, vary in quality. Many of them are over-wordy (step forward Don McGregor) and lumber towards a somewhat non-venomous sting in the tal. The best, however, are very good indeed. 'Bowser', by regular Corben collaborator Jan Strnad, is a gruesome y black-humoured take on the suburban nuclear family and their pet, while 'Unprovoked Attack On A Hilton Hotel', by Jim Stenstrum is satirical SF at its best. Three Poe adaptations allow Corben to indu ge his flair for the Gothic, and those who find h s distinct on of meaty, enormo-breasted women appealing need look no further than a trilogy of time-travel ta es penned by Bruce Jones. Jones also authored the collection's standout, 'In Deep', a grotesque and gory shark-attack-survivor ta e much indebted to *Jaws*.

Heaven for Corben comp et sts – or the just Corben curious. **James Lovegrove**

HIT-GIRL

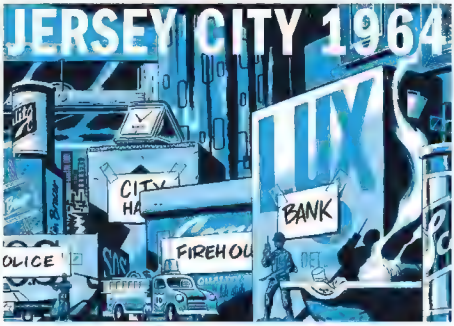
WRITER: Mark Millar
ARTIST: John Romita Jr
PUBLISHER: Icon (Marvel)
OUT: Now
★★★★

With most Mark Millar projects you can rely on a few things: perfect craftsmanship, rough edges, incredibly compelling basic concepts, an adolescent's desire to shock. And *Kick-Ass* has always been Millar at his most extreme as it gets, full of violence and giggling and sharp pop culture references – the film, controversial though it was, was very much toned down – and generally providing a giddy rush of Wrong.

The basic concept – this is (pretty much) the real world, not a superhero universe, and when geeky kids dress up as crimefighters they find the mob a more-than-capable opponent – is predictably strong, but little Mindy McCready (über-confident pre-teen ninja Hit-Girl) has always been the most sci-fi aspect of the whole thing, and here her struggles with fitting in at school, training Kick-Ass to be a suitable partner, and keeping her activities secret from a suspicious stepdad, stretch credulity as much as, well, she always does.

This miniseries fills in the gaps between *Kick-Ass* and *Kick-Ass 2*, and – though it's the reviewer's biggest cop-out ever – if you liked *Kick-Ass* you'll doubtless like this.

Meanwhile, the third act, *Kick Ass 2*, is already available as a graphic novel: gory, gleefully tasteless, snappy and fun, occasionally touching, really quite vile. I felt dirty reading it. The days when we were shocked by the likes of *The Longbow Hunters* never seemed further away. **Matt Bielby**



RICHARD STARK'S PARKER: THE SCORE

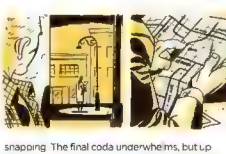
WRITERS: Donald E Westlake and Darwyn Cooke
ARTIST: Darwyn Cooke
PUBLISHER: IDW
OUT: Now
★★★★

Parker – no first name – is the creation of Richard Stark, a pseudonym of the acclaimed crime novelist Donald E. Westlake. He's an early-'60s noir hardman, always up for a heist or a dame, perpetually angry. You cross him at your peril.

Darwyn Cooke's adaptations of the Parker novels, of which this is the third, recreate the style and language of the originals to a T. They're terse and edgy, the art deceptively rough and illuminated by patches of spot colour (in this instance, orange). Cooke's love of the period was already evident in his gorgeous retro DC mini-series *The New Frontier*, back in 2004-5. Here it's a wan full reminder with his depiction of long sedans, late-night diners, rooms awash with cigarette smoke, men in pork pie hats and sharp suits, women in architectural brassieres. It's beautiful work, too much so, perhaps, to ever be as colour-bodded as the books. Still: wow. Even the endpapers look like something you'd see covering a living room wall in *Mad Men*.

Parker finds himself inveigled into a robbery to end all robberies: the target isn't a single bank or jewellery store but an entire mining town. The place is situated in a box canyon in North Dakota, with a state police barracks inconveniently nearby. The risks are huge, but so is the potential take.

Much of the page count is taken up with the immaculate preparations for the crime, and then the execution of the act itself. It all unfolds with clockwork precision, so that when things go wrong, as they inevitably must, the tension is released explosively, like a watchspring snapping. The final coda underwhelms, but up until then *The Score* is a clenched fist of a book, poised to punch you in the face. In a good way. **James Lovegrove**



SMALL PRESS ROUND-UP

Eco-warriors, dead cowboys, urban vampires and World War 2 superneroes...

THE RECKONING
WRITER: Jimmy Pearson
ARTIST: Patrick Walsh
OUT: Now
★★★★½

EL BIGOTE: A TEQUILA-DRENCHED RECKONING
WRITER: Matthew McLaughlin
ARTIST: El Chivo
OUT: Now
★★★½

MAN FROM SPACE
WRITER/ARTIST: Marc Jackson
OUT: Now
★★★

NESTOR
WRITER: Mike Lynch
ARTIST: Paul McCallan
OUT: Now
★★★★

TITAN
WRITER: Glen Ludlow
ARTIST: Gary Seaward
OUT: Now
★★★★½

Life on the ocean wave isn't everything it's cracked up to be you know, even with the best will in the world. The crew of The Warrior, an eco-friendly ship attempting to save the whale in *The Reckoning* (bit.ly/thereckoning), find that out pretty quickly when three Japanese fishing boats are swallowed up by an underwater beastie in the opening pages.

Sharply written by Jimmy Pearson, *The Reckoning* is part *Jaws*, part *Cloverfield*, and a cracking start to a nine-part series. A fine cover and classy linework from Patrick Walsh keep the standards high, making this a terror from the deep you'll want to investigate further.

Every cowboy dreams of crossing the border, escaping to Mexico and living out the rest of his days drenched in tequila. But what happens to the gunslingers that were too slow off the draw? Haunted Mexico, the land between the living and the dead, is the atmospheric setting for this one-shot, *El Bigote. A Tequila-Drenched Reckoning* (bit.ly/elbigotecomic), which pits deceased desperado El Bigote against the outlaws that put him in his grave. A potent cocktail of black comedy, zombie-like splatter and scratchy black and white artwork, it's occasionally derailed by seemingly random use of Spanish – but as vengeful dead gunfighters go, El Bigote is a pretty damn cool one.

Swapping long-dead cowboys for a bearded space loon, *Man From Space* (bit.ly/manfromspace) by Marc Jackson is a Technicolor trip that follows the adventures of a man, his spaceship and a goldfish called Michael. Blocky and bursting with colour there's not much plot but there are a number of just-about-weird-enough ideas, including an enormous talking head made of sand, various strains of killer robot and a purple man-thing called Whemblo. It's not exactly high art, but there are enough regular laughs to keep you reading.

Laughs are pretty thin on the ground in *Nestor* (bit.ly/nestorcomic), a grim and gritty urban vampire tale from Ireland's Abandoned Comics. In this considered and stylish debut issue, we're introduced to titular antihero *Gone With The Wind*-obsessed teenage shelf-stacker Nestor, and given a glimpse at the blood-spattered action that is sure to follow in issue two. Elegant, clean linework suit the hoodie-horror angle perfectly, and Mike Lynch's tight, well-paced writing packs issue one full of ideas and incident, with a cliffhanger thrown in for good measure. A confident, assured antidote for sufferers of *Twilight*-induced vampire fatigue.

World War 2 era super-soldiers aren't exactly a new idea, but Glen Ludlow and Gary Seaward's *Titan* (bit.ly/titancomic) one-shot injects the idea with enough energy for it not to matter. A bigger celebrity than The Beatles when he was at his peak in the mid-'60s, Titan, Britain's foremost superhero, faces the fight of his life when the media turn on him. Bursting with action and making excellent use of interview transcripts and newspaper clippings to flesh out the story, Ludlow and Seaward have created a homegrown superhero landscape that is crying out for further development. More of this stuff, please. **Rob Power**

SMALL PRESSERS! **Send your work to:** Rob Power, Comic Heroes, Future Publishing, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath, BA1 2BW; or, alternatively, send links to **rob.power@futurenet.com**

Christian Bale: a superb Bruce Wayne.

BATMAN BOWS OUT

THE DARK KNIGHT RISES
DIRECTOR: Christopher Nolan
DISTRIBUTOR: Warner Bros
CERTIFICATE: 12A
RUNNING TIME: 164 minutes
CAST: Christian Bale, Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Gary Oldman, Tom Hardy, Anne Hathaway & Michael Caine
OUT: Now
★★★★

As Bat-fever begins to clear and the hype machines gently wind down, we can finally examine *The Dark Knight Rises* hysteria free. Hooray.

By now, you'll likely have seen it at least once, but in case you've been at the bottom of a well, here's the down low: it's been eight years since Batman disappeared after the death of Harvey Dent. Bruce Wayne, now a broken man, is forced out of retirement when Bane, a highly dangerous criminal mastermind, brings chaos to Gotham.

The basics of the plot sit in familiar Batman versus big bad guy territory, but *The Dark Knight Rises* is far more complex than that. Capping off Nolan's trilogy with a studied bombast, it revels in comic book fantasy writ large, with a satirical swipe at the economic crisis thrown in for good measure. Far from the bubblegum pop of Marvel's all-conquering *Avengers Assemble*, *The Dark Knight Rises* instead ponders the real cost of superheroics, physically, mentally and philosophically.

Much of this is down to Christian Bale's trilogy-topping performance as Bruce Wayne. Fragile, uncertain, more human than Batman has any right to be and all the more endearing for it, he's a million miles away from the cocky billionaire of years gone by.

Bale isn't the only standout; Anne Hathaway's Selina Kyle, all slinky black leather and cheeky one-liners, is playful and dangerous in all the right places, aided and abetted by first-rate costume design. Meanwhile Tom Hardy brings a swaggering menace to Bane, a towering presence who manages to intimidate regardless of that muffling facemask and bizarre accent.

Bigger and bolder in every conceivable way than its predecessors, Nolan ramps the action up to almost absurd heights, but it's a gambit that only partially pays off. Sequences that should have felt huge – the football field collapse, the mass bridge destruction around Gotham – are a little lost in the mix. Similarly, Batman's battles with Bane – the shock of Batman's cowl smashing to pieces under Bane's meaty fists aside – feel a little too pat, plodding rather than pulse-quickening.

Nolan's plundering of Bat-history serves him particularly well. Aspects of 'Knightfall' and 'The Dark Knight Returns' are made excellent use of, and in particular *that* scene from 'Knightfall' is beautifully played out.

This will certainly be the most divisive movie of the series. The ending, in particular, is either incredibly hackneyed or perfect depending on your point of view – and questionable internal logic will stick in the craw of some. Regardless, Nolan has delivered a thrilling, genuinely epic finale to a trilogy that has redefined a genre. **Rob Power**

BATMOBILE: THE COMPLETE HISTORY
AUTHOR: Mark Cotta Vaz
PUBLISHER: Titan
OUT: Now
★★★★

THE DARK KNIGHT MANUAL
AUTHOR: Brandon T Snider
PUBLISHER: Titan
OUT: Now
★★★½

If you're in the grip of a full-blown Batman addiction, you'll likely fall instantly in love with this pair of glossy coffee table books. Mark Cotta Vaz's *Batmobile: The Complete History* is the pick of the bunch. It's arguably a little bit Tumbler heavy, with a huge amount of space dedicated to telling the story of the latest big-screen Batmobile, but why the hell not? It's a wonderful piece of imaginative engineering, and the processes behind its design and construction are well worth pondering.

The Dark Knight Manual, meanwhile, is a lovingly compiled exercise in fictional scrapbooking. If Chris Nolan's Batman kept a handy file full of everything anyone could ever want to know about him, this would be it. Full to bursting with authentic-ish looking police files, Batman-authored Post-its, maps and blueprints, it's a lot of fun – but ultimately tells us little we don't already know. **Rob Power**

LOS BROS ROUND UP

GOD AND SCIENCE: RETURN OF THE TI-GIRLS
WRITER/ARTIST: Jamie Hernandez
PUBLISHER: Fantagraphics
OUT: Now
★★★★

THE ADVENTURES OF VENUS
WRITER/ARTIST: Gilbert Hernandez
PUBLISHER: Fantagraphics
OUT: Now
★★★

A joy of comics over the past 30 years has been the efforts of Los Bros Hernandez, Hispanic Southern Californian brothers Jamie and Gilbert, with their female-centric dramas happy to flip-flop between kitchen-sink reality and outlandish sci-fi fun. Their B&W anthology, *Love And Rockets*, was one of the hits of the alternative comics boom of the early '80s.

God And Science: Return Of The Ti-Girls is an updated, much-added-to version of Jamie's first serial from 2008's *Love And Rockets: New Stories*. It's a lightweight, bouncy superhero adventure, grounded by some very real domestic stuff with Jamie's heroine Maggie and given spice by a Mexican wrestling theme. Yes, the whole thing slightly outstays its welcome, but there's some touching stuff about madness, motherhood and the dangers of getting what you want along the way.

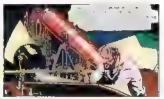
Yet slighter, and just as loveable, is *The Adventures Of Venus* – a rare kids' story from Gilbert – starring the niece of *his* main female lead Luba, in fun little adventures full of forests, comic books, football and sci-fi daydreams. Kids may not love it, but we certainly did. **Matt Bielby**

FLASH GORDON: ON THE PLANET MONGO

WRITER/ARTIST: Alex Raymond
PUBLISHER: Titan Books
OUT: Now
★★★★

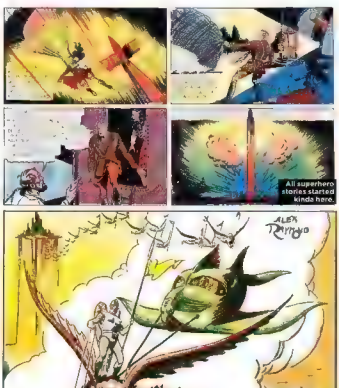
Now this is amazing: the first in a series of luxury hardcover collections of Alex Raymond's masterful, supremely influential *Flash Gordon* newspaper strips of the mid-'30s, it was the *Buck Rogers* imitator that soon outstripped its model, and in turn inspired the entire superhero industry (hell, half the artists in comics have swiped a Raymond pose in their time).

You know the basic tale, of course: rogue planet threatens Earth, and polo(!) star Flash, plucky lass Dale Arden and borderline-banking scientist Dr Zarkov rocket off to meet them, there to encounter a fantastical world of strange monsters and alien races, half sci-fi and half fairytale, ruled over by the despotic Ming. This first collection contains all the full-colour Sunday strips from 1934-37, in which time Raymond's work becomes notably more elaborate and romantic.



> **Flash is remarkably scowling**

Some things surprise. Flash himself is remarkably scowling and aloof (as many a randy space princess finds to her despair), S&M (flogging a speciality) abounds, and some of the 'twists' on regular Earth stuff are so half-arsed as to be laughable: horned tigers called 'tigrons', giant toothy fish called 'sharkons', vicious little tree-dwellers called 'squirlons'. It doesn't matter, as a whole this is magnificent, and certain panels – Flash holding a spear, the attack of the hawkmen – are once seen, never forgotten. **Matt Bielby**



World's Finest

In conversation with the comic book legends...

Neal Adams

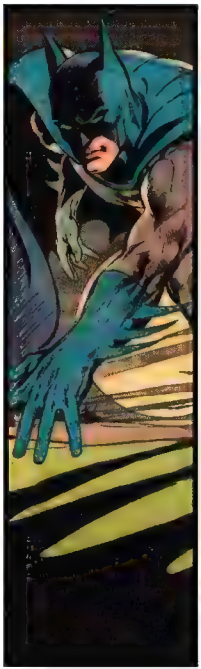
Do or die, baby!

Words by David Currie

"I'm the kind of guy you don't fuck with!"

Even today, it's hard to overestimate the importance of Neal Adams, one of the greatest, and certainly most influential, comic book artists of all time. He defined the look of the modern-age *Batman*; he helped make comics 'relevant' in the '60s; and he was key to creating the (currently booming) original comic page art market.

More, he had the guts, energy and skill to take on those unstoppable giants, Marvel and DC, when he thought they were doing wrong – and win. Oh, and he knows the secret history of how the Earth was created too. It's a lot to get your head around – too much to easily squeeze into one conversation – but *Comic Heroes* was game to give it a try...



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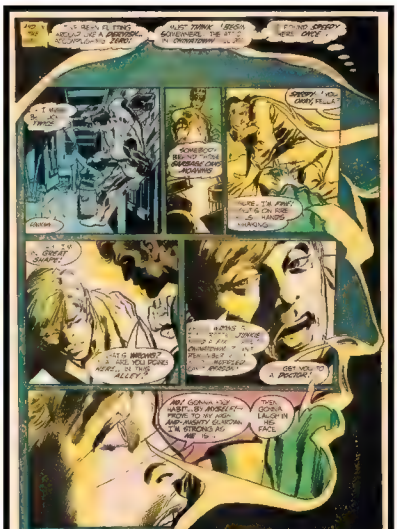
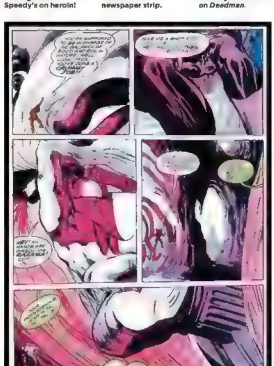


01 ***Green Lantern/ Green Arrow* v2 #86, 1971**
The big reveal: Speedy's on heroin!

02 ***Ben Casey*, 1963**
The US TV medical drama inspired an Adams-drawn newspaper strip.

03 ***Strange Adventures***
Here, Adams demonstrates his mastery of his art on *Deadman*.


YOU'RE DOING OKAY, BUDDY! I'LL GET YOU OUT OF THIS!
THAT'S A BOY!
HEY! I'M NOT DEAD YET!
I'M NOT DEAD YET!
I'M NOT DEAD YET!

01 *X-Men* #57, 1969
Adams tilted the panels diagonally to make Beast's fall seem longer.

02 *Strange Adventures* #214, 1968
The first full-length *Deadman* story, 'To Haunt A Killer'.

03 *Batman* #237, 1971
Adams shows his talent for facial detail on 'Night Of The Reaper'

such as *Superman Vs Spider-Man*, the first cross-company book ever published – and climaxed with the spectacular *Superman Vs Muhammad Ali* oversized one-shot in 1978; by then, however, his own company, Continuity Studios, was flourishing and Adams largely disappeared from mainstream funnybooks. (But not from comic book art: Continuity was, and is, largely an illustration studio, selling comic book-style imagery to the ad and movie industries – and, in doing so, providing employment to many of Adams' contemporaries.)

The more mature – shall we say? – fans have been thrilled, then, to see Adams' recent return to the mainstream, to Marvel's X-Men (in the new *The First X-Men* book) and DC's Batman, in the *Batman: Odyssey* miniseries. The style has changed, somewhat, but it's still very obviously Adams – and nobody draws quite like him. Adams is proud of his body of work, naturally, but it's his behind-doors brawls with management, fought to improve industry standards, that he's most vocal about today.

"I'm the kind of guy you don't fuck with," he says, continuing from where we started, "because I do my research. I have a history of being right [laughs]. And I'm right simply because I do my research and you don't."

And this is how you helped win back all that art?

"When I was fighting for the return of original art, I didn't just go to the offices of Marvel and DC and say, 'Hey, please return the art'. I went to the companies and said: 'Do you believe that you bought this original art?' They would say, 'Yeah, of course we bought it!' Until I said, 'Well, did you pay sales tax on it?' If I buy some art, I have to pay sales tax on it. It's the law. If I didn't pay sales tax, I didn't buy it."

Puts them in a tricky position: admit you didn't buy it..

"Or the State of New York will come down on you and say, 'Guess what, DC Comics? You owe 50 years of back sales tax on every page of art you bought!' It was a good year for all comic artists that year – everybody doubled their income!"

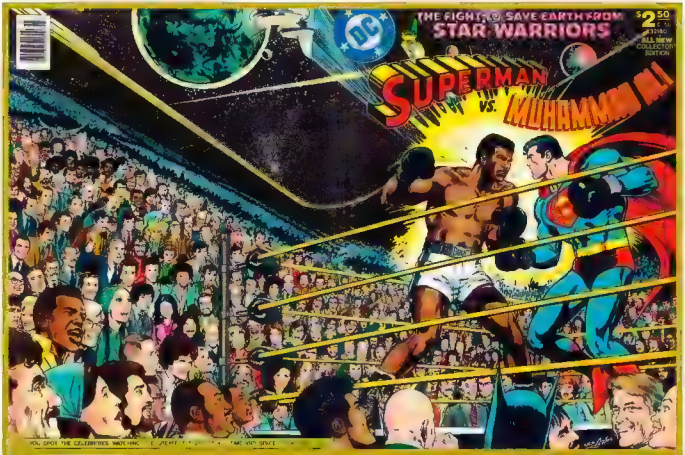
[illegible] pages provided artists with much-needed additional income, as they could sell them on to fans at conventions. This opened the floodgates, a trickle at first, to the burgeoning original comic art market of today – where classic pages by the right artist can sell for the price of a house.

But not all pages were returned to the penciller, and the potential for dispute and in-fighting was clear after all, if the inker also receives a share and (in some cases) the writer too, who decides who gets the best ones?

"I also helped to raise page pay rates," Adams says, "simply by communicating rates between artists. I'd say, 'I'm getting this for this book, what are you getting?' Normally, the reply was, 'Oh, I'm not getting *that*. But I will be on Monday'."

It has to be remembered that all this took place at a time when a climate of fear existed between artist and employer. In the nickel-and-dime atmosphere of the late '60s and '70s, artists who enjoyed any kind of success and recognition were rewarded with punishing work schedules. Everything was done work-for-hire, which accorded the artist no right to claims of ownership for anything created for the company, or royalties paid on any merchandising or reprinting of material, no right, even, to have your original art handed back after publication.

Worse, as many artists were not getting enough work from one company to earn an effective living, they risked the wrath of commissioning editors by taking on



NEAL ADAMS | Major Works

01 BEN CASEY | 1962-1966
Daily newspaper strip, based on the popular US TV hospital drama; lots of faces, and a fair few cars – the Adams ultra-realist style starts here.

02 STRANGE ADVENTURES | 1967-1968
Adams begins a run on *Deadman* that earns him industry-wide attention and awards for 'the new perspective and dynamic vibrancy he's brought to the field of comic art'.

03 X-MEN | 1969
Adams' ground-breaking early Marvel work, where he strained, with writer Roy Thomas and inker Tom Palmer, to revitalise the flagging mutant book. Visually, an amazing run – though few noticed at the time and the comic was cancelled with #66, after less than a dozen issues.

04 BATMAN/DETECTIVE COMICS | 1970-74
Adams returns Batman to his Dark Knight roots – no Robin, lots of swirling cape – and defines the character for the modern age.

05 GREEN LANTERN/GREEN ARROW | 1970-72
Celebrated, gorgeous, kinda po-faced: comics get relevant, man! (One issue even featured a sort-of modern Jesus!)

06 AVENGERS | 1971-1972
The Kree-Skrull War took superheroes into space, blew minds.

07 SUPERMAN VS MUHAMMAD ALI | 1978
Adams' last work for DC before concentrating on Continuity Studios remains a personal favourite of the artist, not least because his work was reproduced at virtually the size of the original art in an oversized tabloid format. (Less wonderful: the 'toilet paper' stock that Adams so despised.)

01 ***The Avengers* #93, 1971**
The epic 'Kree-Skull War' saga: a comic book classic in the making

02 ***The Brave And The Bold* #86, 1969**
It seems Batman's friends are all out to get him!

03 ***Batman Vol 1* #231, 1973**
A landmark issue. The evil Joker's back doing what he does best.

additional work for rivals. (As a result, some worked under pseudonyms, explaining why Gene Colan made his Silver Age debut at Marvel as 'Adam Austin', Gil Kane signed off as 'Scott Edward' and *Spider-Man* inker Mike Esposito also worked as 'Mickey Demeo'.)

Neal Adams was the first artist to work openly for both Marvel and DC, breaking this unwritten rule.

"I only step up if everything is wrong," he claims. "The industry was a fucking mess, it really was. Comics were printed on toilet paper, with the worst reproduction. It needed straightening out. And sometimes that involved taking people by the shirt fronts and yelling, 'No! You can't do that! This is a worthwhile and important industry – and if you don't do it right, I'm gonna shake you until you do!'"

And did people like being shaken?

"The industry still hasn't quite got it. Things have improved – some people can actually raise a family on what they earn from comics – but there's still a long way to go. Marvel, for example, still don't pay royalties to creators for characters used in movies."

But creators do get extra money in other ways.

"Artists now get royalties on trade paperback collections, but I had to help argue the case for that as well. They said they didn't have to pay royalties because it wasn't a book, it was a comic – a periodical. What defines a periodical? Well, two thirds is advertising, I just pointed out that a trade paperback collection has very little, if any, advertising – sort of like a book!"

> ***"The industry was a mess... it needed straightening out"***

BRAVE + BOLD #86 · O. N. ·
4
TO BE PRIVY TO THE SERVICE OF OBLITERATING MANKIND'S GREATEST MENACE--THE BATMAN!
CAN ANYTHING BE ...MORE "BAD" TOO...? IS EVERYONE MAD?!
AGAIN THE SPRING-TRIGGER REFLEXES OF GOTHAM'S GUARDIAN COME INTO PLAY, AND..
BONK
SPEYANG
BUT IT MUST BE BATMAN! OLD FRIEND...
DEADMAN...
"TRYING TO KILL ME."
WHAT'S GOING ON? I JUST BLANKED OUT!
YOU JUST TRIED TO KILL BATMAN AND SO DID I! BUT--BUT
THERE'S ONLY ONE ANSWER BUT IT'S TOO HORRIBLE TO RELATE.
BATMAN WIN
02
4

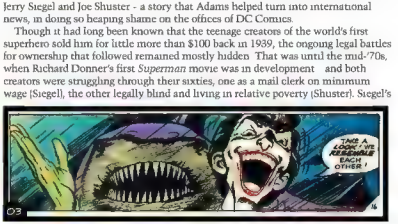
Not that long after Adams was out there dominating the industry, however, people like Claremont and Byrne were making very handsome livings off things like *X-Men*. It helped that that book now sold like gangbusters, of course.

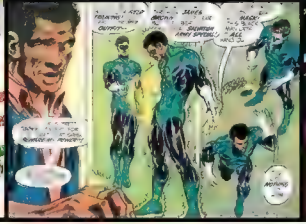
"Well, if the comic I'm about to draw is currently selling 70,000 a month, and I work my hardest to make sure it sells above that, wouldn't it profit you to pay me a royalty? I can tell you this: if I'm not going to get any extra money making it sell above that 70,000, I'll just do [a basic] job and take more work from the advertising agencies instead."

Ah yes, the agencies. Adams could get away with being as demanding as he was because of the enviable – and near unique – position he was in, heavily in demand by comic publishers and Madison Avenue alike. It's this, more than anything, that enabled him to negotiate from a position of strength

AS HAS NO DOUBT BECOME clear, Adams is as outspoken today as he's always has been on such matters, not least in his stance on the case of *Superman* creators Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster - a story that Adams helped turn into international news, in doing so heaping shame on the offices of DC Comics.

Though it had long been known that the teenage creators of the world's first superhero sold him for little more than $100 back in 1939, the ongoing legal battles for ownership that followed remained mostly hidden. That was until the mid-'70s, when Richard Donner's first *Superman* movie was in development – and both creators were struggling through their sixties, one as a mail clerk on minimum wage (Siegel), the other legally blind and living in relative poverty (Shuster). Siegel's





Key Creations

Much of Neal Adams' greatness is from revitalising existing heroes, but he contributed new faces too...

Ra's Al Ghul and the League of Assassins
An all-time classic villain, co-created with Denny O'Neil and used to great effect in *Batman Begins*.

First seen: *Batman* #232, June 1971

Man-Bat
Another iconic addition to Batman's rogue's gallery, co-created with Frank Robbins.

First seen: *Detective Comics* #400, June 1970

Havok
One of the best costumes in comics! Co-created with Arnold Drake and Don Heck.

First seen: *X-Men* #54, March 1969

Sauron
A vampiric humanoid pterosaur with a less-than-original name; co-created with Roy Thomas.

First seen: *X-Men* #60, September 1969

John Stewart (Green Lantern)
One of DC's first black superheroes, co-created with Denny O'Neil.

First seen: *Green Lantern* #87, December 1971

Mockingbird
Hawkeye's love interest. Co-created with Len Wein in a story intended for publication in *Savage Tales* #2, June 1971.

First seen: *Astonishing Tales* #6, June 1971

exasperation at his decades-long battle led him to pen a very vitriolic letter to the press, cursing the *Superman* movie. "I hope it super-bombs," Siegel wrote. "I hope loyal *Superman* fans stay away from it in droves. I hope the whole world, becoming aware of the stench that surrounds *Superman*, will avoid the movie like the plague. The publishers of *Superman* comic books, National Periodical Publications Inc, killed my days, murdered my nights, choked my happiness, strangled my career. I consider National's executives economic murderers, money-mad monsters."

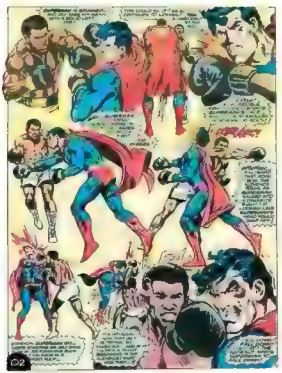
Armed with this, Adams – along with fellow artist and creator-rights advocate Jerry Robinson – began a three-month campaign to win better treatment for Siegel and Shuster, ultimately earning them a handsome yearly pension and the medical insurance they badly needed.

"It was the Donner movie that gave us that leverage," Adams recalls.

Unweathered by all these battles over the years, the 71-year-old Neal Adams of today is extremely optimistic about the future of comics – or, at least, of comic art. He continues to produce new work, often exploring fresh areas – witness his online comics illustrating tales of hope, drawn from the real-life stories of people who fought back during The Holocaust – as well as some very familiar ones, as with the current *Batman Odyssey* series.

"I think the important thing to remember," he says, "is that comics are taking over the world. Every art student that I speak to wants to become a comic book artist – or do something comic-related. People who don't get it are in the back seat of the car! They seem to make this distinction between fine art and comic art, as if there's a great chasm to be breached – and that's insane.

"Fine art was once just some guy doing his crap, and it becomes fine art because of the galleries and reviewers who deem it such. And the next step is comic art. Why? Because there's so much of it, so many talented people doing it, and it has such great cultural significance – movies, TV shows, computer games. As a result, you're bound to get artists drawn to it, because it's the major



01 ***Superman Vs Muhammad Ali*, 1975**
The 72-page oversized one-shot was plagued by production delays...

02 ***Superman Vs Muhammad Ali*, 1975**
...which meant that Ali had lost his Heavyweight title by the time it came out

market for a talented person. In fact, if you're talented, why go anywhere else?"

Blimey! No doom and gloom here, then!

"In the last 20 years," Adams says, "I've seen pages of my own original comic art go up in value from $50 to about $10,000. That's a magnificent jump in value which has nothing to do with reviewers or promotion. It happened naturally, because of fans and collectors. Original comic art gains in value exponentially – where will it be five years from now, even? What on earth will it evolve into?"

Also part of this comic book renaissance, as Adams sees it, is the continuing rise of the major comic book convention.

"Fifteen years back, Comic-Cons failed even in New York. Now, in the US, there are 52 conventions a year! That's one a week! Interest now is gigantic!"

Partly down to you, of course.

"Whatever contribution I made, or role I played, in the birthing of this new generation of artists and fans, it's now out of my hands."

Adams is elusive when asked what he regards as the highlight of his career. Was it *Batman!* The 'Kree-Skrull War'! *Green Lantern/Green Arrow*? *Superman Vs Muhammad Ali* is one often quoted.

The answer – at least, the one I get – is surprising, and illustrates the near-unique position Adams has always held, straddling two worlds. By the end of his description, I was almost ready for a test drive…

"It's a car," he says. "Designed by General Motors, allowing America to enter the inexpensive family car market. They finally did it – $14,000, 35mpg."

This, it turns out, is the Chevrolet Sonic, known as the Chevy Aveo in the UK (and many other places) and sold around the world as assorted Pontiacs and Holdens, Suzukis and Daewoos. Adams has worked on automobile accounts before – the 1997 campaign for the 'all-new Mercury Tracer' took the form of a six panel strip – but this time he's actually slapped superheroes from his *Rise Of Magic* strip all over an actual promotional car, with two teams facing off against each other over the bonnet as a skull-faced chap cackles with glee.

"They asked me to illustrate the car and I was happy to do so – because I feel that America is trying to rediscover its place in the world, and this might help. So that's what I consider the highlight of my career so far. But I've enjoyed everything, of course – I've never created *anything* I didn't like doing."

[redacted] on a mission, Neal Adams is famously, controversially, also an advocate of the Expanding Earth theory, one that suggests the movement of the continents is caused, at least partially, by the planet's volume increasing – an idea scientific consensus has frowned upon since the late '60s and the arrival of plate tectonics theory. A few years back, he announced to the comic press that he was producing a graphic novel explaining his take on the matter, and how his conclusions would change the way people believe the Earth was created. So, how's he doing with that?

"I'm reworking it a lot," Adams says, "because so much has happened since to advance the theory. I'm now looking at it as a movie treatment. You get a lot of information on my website – www.nealadams.com – while some of the science is explained on YouTube, where a lot of debate about the theory takes place."

We could have asked him to explain the whole thing a little better, and possibly even offered a subjective reply – but we'll confess, we were worried. There was a good chance we'd get something wrong, after all, and if there's one thing we've learned: you don't fuck with Neal Adams! **[CR]**

Something Inhuman This Way Comes

Why Adams Matters

We're so spoiled for great comic book artists today that it's hard to imagine one of them turning the industry *upside down*. But Neal Adams did just that. Here's how...

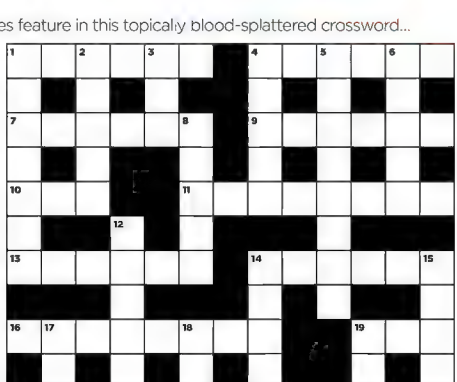
GREEN LANTERN
GREEN ARROW
JUNKIE
JUNKIE
JUNKIE

Victim & Murderer

THE COMIC HEROES CROSSWORD

Both bad guys and killer heroes feature in this topically blood-splattered crossword...

Starred clues are the names of murder victims; in each case, you need to put the name of his or her murderer in the grid. (Note: Not all of the victims have remained dead. This is comics, after all.)



ACROSS

1 and **20** Captain America (6, 6)*
4 _____ And Steve, strip about a pair of blue rabbits that first appeared in *The Dandy* in November 2010, written and drawn by Nigel Auchterlounie (6)
7 _____ Curry, better known as Aquaman (6)
9 Someone who takes another's life – as in the themed entries in this crossword (6)
10 _____ Wein, veteran comics writer, co-creator of *Swamp Thing* and first scripter on *New X-Men* (3)
11 Batman (8)*
13 Mitchell _____, civilian alter ego of master assassin and former S.H.I.E.L.D agent Warhawk (6)
14 Arkham _____, where Gotham's maddest baddies are sent (6)
16 Superman (8)*
19 _____ *Is Hell* from Marvel or *Weird Tales* from DC (3)
20 (see 1 across)
21 Hero with electromagnetic powers, originally a Milestone Comics character (6)
23 _____ *Hands Of Kung Fu*, '70s black-and-white Marvel martial arts magazine (6)
24 _____ Pennyworth, niece of Bruce Wayne's manservant Alfred, or _____ Blake, a member of Mystery Inc., to be found in any number of *Scooby-Doo* comics (6)

DOWN

1 and **19** Agatha Harkness (7, 5)*
2 _____ Arcane, scientist-magician foe of Swamp Thing and uncle of Swampy's girlfriend Abby (5)
3 Abbreviation for Original Marvel Universe (3)
4 Robin, Jason Todd (5)*
5 Elektra (8)*
6 _____ Thistledown, character in *Forgotten Realms: Sojourn* (5)
8 Richard _____, aka Nova The Human Rocket (5)
12 *Batman: The* _____ *Series*, which aired from 1992 to 1995 (8)
14 Mutant shapeshifter who can absorb people into himself and is Nightcrawler's half-brother (5)
15 Mister _____, super escape artist, real name Scott Free (7)
17 Surname of family of Irish-American police officers, found in James Robinson's *Starman* (5)
18 Type of hat perennially worn by S.H.I.E.L.D's 'Dum Dum' Dugan (5)
19 (see 1 down)
22 Galactus' homeworld, and also the Green Lantern of the planet Zilliph (3)

Across: 1 Steven 4 Jabber 7 Jerry 9 Killer 10 Len 11 Batwoman 13 Wayne 14 Asylum 16 Superman 19 Bad 20 Captain 24 Calamity
Down: 1 Scarlet 2 Anton 3 OMU 4 Jack 5 Sidewise 8 Grant 12 Animated 14 Apsis 15 Houdini 17 O'Dwyer 18 Derby 19 Mad 22 Tsab

COMIC HEROES PRESENTS

JUDGE DREDD

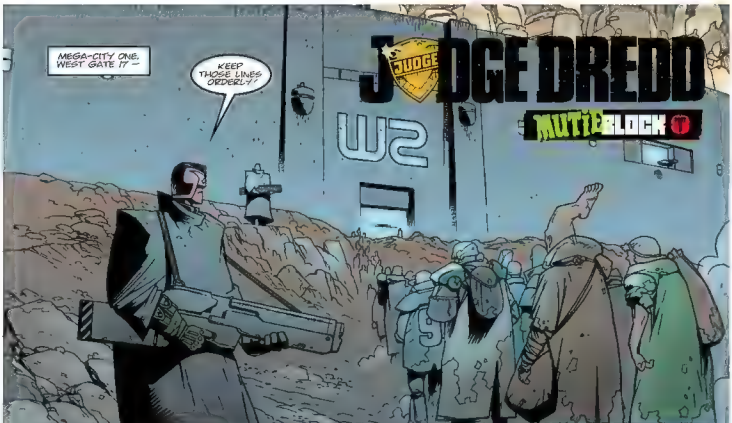
ATTACK THE BLOCK!

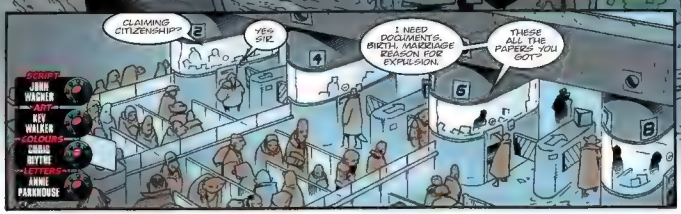
2 head-breaking tales, starring the toughest lawman of them all...

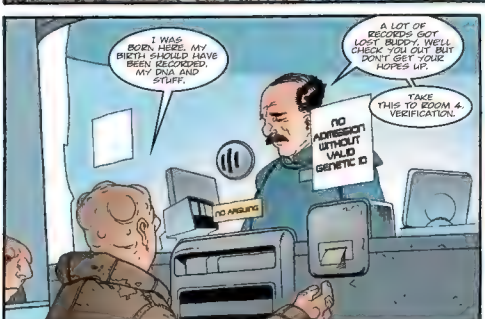
Mutie Block
John Wagner / Kev Walker

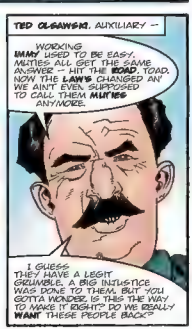
Meat
Rob Williams / Dylan Teague

Comic Heroes Presents #1
Free with Comic Heroes 514
September/October 2012


MEGA-CITY ONE. WEST GATE IT --
KEEP THOSE LINES ORDERLY!
JUDGE DREDD
MUTIE BLOCK
W2


CLAIMING CITIZENSHIP?
YES SIR.
I NEED DOCUMENTS. BIRTH, MARRIAGE REASON FOR EXPULSION.
THESE ALL THE PAPERS YOU GOT?
SCRIPT JOHN WAGNER
ART KEV WALKER
COLOURS CHRIS BUTTON
LETTERS ANNIE PARKHOUSE


I WAS BORN, HERE. MY BIRTH SHOULD HAVE BEEN RECORDED, MY DNA AND STUFF.
A LOT OF RECORDS GOT LOST, BUDDY. WE'LL CHECK YOU OUT, BUT DON'T GET YOUR HOPES UP.
TAKE THIS TO ROOM 4. VERIFICATION.
NO ADMISSION WITHOUT VALID GENETIC ID
NO ARGUING


TED OLSAWSKI, AUXILIARY --
WORKING IMMY USED TO BE EASY. MUTIES ALL GET THE SAME ANSWER -- HIT THE ROAD, YOAD. NOW THE LAW'S CHANGED AN' WE AIN'T EVEN SUPPOSED TO CALL THEM MUTIES ANYMORE.
I GUESS THEY HAVE A LEGIT GRUMBLE. A BIG INJUSTICE WAS DONE TO THEM. BUT YOU GOTTA WONDER, IS THIS THE WAY TO MAKE IT RIGHT? DO WE REALLY WANT THESE PEOPLE BACK?

NDUCTIO
YOU HAVE ALL BEEN APPROVED TO CLAIM CITIZENSHIP OF MEGA-CITY ONE. BEFORE I HAND YOU TO OUR ALLOCATIONS OFFICER, I'D LIKE TO GIVE YOU SOME FRIENDLY ADVICE – THINK AGAIN.
DESPITE WHAT YOU MAY HAVE HEARD, LIFE IN THIS CITY IS NO BOWL OF ROSES.
ENIGMA TURNER, AUXILIARY –
THEY CALL ME INDUCTION OFFICER. I'M REALLY A KIND OF OFFICIAL 'DISHADEE'. I SHOW THEM THE UNEMPLOYMENT, CRIME AND SUICIDE STATS. I GO REAL BIG ON PREJUDICE. THEY'VE GOT TO REALISE A THING TO BE PUBLIC ENEMY NUMBER ONE.
NO MUTIES
I'M TALKING ABOUT HATE. PURE, UNBRIDLED HATE. YOU WILL BE TARGETS FOR VERBAL AND PHYSICAL ABUSE. YOU WILL BE SINGLED OUT FOR VIOLENT ASSAULT, MURDER. STATS – NORM ON MUTANT – ARE 3000 PER CENT ABOVE AVERAGE.
SURE THE JUDGES WILL MAKE ARRESTS, BUT THEY CAN'T ARREST THE WHOLE CITY, BECAUSE – AND LET'S BE HONEST – NOBODY REALLY WANTS YOU HERE.
ASK YOURSELVES – IS THAT THE KIND OF LIFE YOU WANT?
I PAY A BONUS OF FOUR HUNDRED CREDITS TO ANY APPLICANTS WHO TURN BACK, PROVIDED THEY RELINQUISH ALL FURTHER CLAIM TO CITIZENSHIP. SAVES THE CITY A HEAP OF MONEY, BELIEVE ME.
IN THE END, IF THEY STILL WANT TO COME IN, NOTHING I CAN DO. THE LAWS THE LAW. I TRIED MY BEST. IT'S THEIR FUNERAL.

NEW CITIZENS WERE BUSSED INTO SPECIALLY PREPARED BLOCKS DOTTED ACROSS THE MEGA-CITY --
JUDGE DREDD
JUDGE BAKER
MUTIES OUT!
NO MUTIES HERE!
SCUMBOTS!
WHAT ABOUT THE GENE POOL?
KEEP THESE NORMS BACK!
CHAK

JOE McJOE, ORDINARY CIT —
MUTIES ARE LAUGHIN' ALL OVER THEIR FREAK FACES! CITY'S THROWING CASH AT THEM LIKE CONFETTI!
YOU WANT A NEW FREEZE BOX? YOU GOT IT, UGLY! BANJO LESSONS FOR THE JUVIES? NO PROBLEM!
GOT A LITTLE DRIP ON YOUR DIP. WE'LL SEND SOMEONE ROUND TA SHAKE IT FOR YA!
BUT YOU TRY GETTING ANYTHING OUTA THIS CITY IF YOU'RE NORMAL! THAT'S A DIFFERENT STORY!
HERE'S A BRICK.
GO ON. THROW IT. NOBODY'LL SEE YOU.
ARREST THAT CREEP!
IMPATIENCE WATSON, HOUSING DEPT —
WE BEGAN CLEARING THE RESIDENTS OUT OF NORMA JEAN BAKER AS SOON AS THE MUTANT LAW WAS PASSED.
THE IDEAL IS FULL INTEGRATION, OF COURSE. BUT INITIALLY IT WAS FELT THAT MIXED BLOCKS MIGHT BE A TEENSY BIT DIFFICULT TO POLICE.
HIDEY SHEO, MOTHER'S OF MEGA-CITY —
WHAT ARE THEY DOING HERE? WE NEVER ASKED FOR THEM! WE DON'T WANT THEM! THEY'RE TAKING OUR FOOD AND OUR HOUSES AND OUR JOBS!
RIGHT ON, SISTER! WE AIN'T GONNA TAKE IT!
AREN'T THINGS BAD ENOUGH
BACARAS OCOPO, CHURCH OF H.A.T.E. —
LET THE MUTANTS BE PURGED IN THE FLAMES OF OUR RIGHTEOUS ANGER! WE WILL NEVER ACCEPT THE PRESENCE OF THESE DISGUSTING, SUB-HUMAN MONSTROSITIES AMONG US!
ENDELL WENN, ANARCHY IN ACTION —
DISORDER — TURBULENCE CHAOS... THESE ARE THE OPTIMUM CONDITIONS FOR OUR WORK. THE CITY IS A TINDERBOX. ALL THAT IS REQUIRED NOW IS THE RIGHT ORGANISATIONAL SKILLS TO SET IT ALIGHT.

MAY BOXERS1 AFF. A FEW SHORT WEEKS AGO YOUR FAMILY WAS GRUBBING FOR **GRUBS** AT YOUR WASTELAND HOVEL. TODAY, A FINE NEW APARTMENT WITH ALL MOD CONS. HOW DOES IT FEEL?
IT'S JUST WONDERFUL. IT WILL TAKE US A WHILE TO ADAPT, OF COURSE.
AND HAVE YOU MET ANY OF THE LOCALS - **NORMAL** PEOPLE I MEAN?
OH NO. WE DON'T GO OUT. IT'S NOT SAFE. QUITE A FEW RESIDENTS HAVE BEEN VERY BADLY INJURED GOING OUT -- KILLED, EVEN.
THEY FOUND OLD GIB SMELLIE FROM 4228 WITH HIS **HEAD** CUT OFF JUST YESTERDAY.
THEY DON'T LIKE US. IT'S JUST NOT SAFE.
IT WAS SEVERAL WEEKS BEFORE THE ELIT BARRIERS AROUND NORMA JEAN BAKER WERE REMOVED.
GRADUALLY THE GUARD WAS REDUCED AS **PROTESTOR** NUMBERS DWINDLED. UNTIL THERE WERE JUST A FEW **DIEHARD** MUTANT HATERS WILLING TO BRAVE THE COLD OF ONCOMING WINTER.
23:37
WELCOME
NORMA JEAN BAKER
TONIGHT EVEN, **THEY** WERE ABSENT.
STRANGE.
CONTROL, THERE'S NO ONE WATCHING BAKER. WHAT HAPPENED TO THE GUARD?
REASSIGNED TO THAT CLIVE GANG CONFRONT A PRECINCT 4. I FIGURED THEY COULD BE NEEDED FOR AN HOUR OR TWO.
HE DIDN'T LIKE IT. AND WHY NO PROTESTORS? COLD MAYBE, BUT NOT **THAT** COLD.
SOMETHING SMELT WRONG...

TOOT HORNABY, SEVENTEEN, WEST SECTOR GANG ALLIANCE —
THE WORD'S OUT. WE'RE GOING AFTER THE MUTIE BLOCK TONIGHT. WE'RE ALL TOOLED UP, GUNS AN' BLADES AN' ANYTHING THAT'LL BREAK HEADS.
THE-'IZE PASSING ROUND THE ANGRY DUST AND EVERY-BODY'S GETTIN' STEAMED.
FREAKIN' MUTIES AIN'T GONNA KNOW WHAT HIT 'EM.
GONNA SPLASH THEIR JUICE ALL OVER NORMA JAY!
A FEW SNORTS AND I'M IN THE MOOD — AND IT AIN'T FOR LOVE!
BLOOD! BLOOD! BLOOD!
A WORD HERE A WHISPER IN THE RIGHT EARS — PLUS LIBERAL HELPINGS OF BEAN CHOWDER, A SACK OF SACK, JUST TO GET THEM FIRED UP. THAT'S ALL IT TAKES.
IT'S HAPPENING. TONIGHT. MIDNIGHT.
WE'LL BE THERE.
CLICK
ARNIE OAKLEY, COLONEL, ARCHIBALD LEACH BLOCK VOLUNTEERS —
IT'S NOT OUR FULL CITI-DEF UNIT — CAN'T CALL IT CITI-DEF. GAVE EVERY MAN AND WOMAN THE CHANCE TO CRY OFF AND SOME TOOK IT. YELLOWBELLIES. DON'T GIVE A DAMN THEIR CITY'S GOING TO HELL IN A HOVERCRAFT.
WELL, WE DON'T NEED THEM. WE GOT DAMN NEAR A TON OF HIGH-GRADE PLASTEEN AND WE KNOW HOW TO USE IT.
WHAT'RE WE GONNA DO?
BLOW THAT BLOCK SKY HIGH, MAN.
FIRST MUTIE BLOCK ON THE MOON!

NEXT PROG > NIGHT MOVES!

THEY MOVED THROUGH THE CITY LIKE A SWARM OF RATS PUMPED UP HIGH ON DRUGS AND HATE --
JUDGE DREDD
MUTIE BLOCK
TONIGHT THEY WERE GOING TO FIX THOSE MUTIES / FIX 'EM DEAD /
THERE SHE IS /
MORE THAN 40,000 MUTANTS HOUSED IN NOZMA JEAN BAKEE BLOCK. THEY THOUGHT IT WOULD BE SAFER THAT WAY. TONIGHT THEY WERE GOING TO LEARN DIFFERENT...
LOOKS REAL QUIET MAN
THREE MINUTES. WE GO AT MIDNIGHT.
SCRIPT
JOHN WAGNER
ART
KEV WALKER
COLOURS
CHRIS BLYTHE
LETTERS
ANNIE PARKHOUSE

COLONEL ARNIE OAKLEY, ARCHIBALD LEACH BLOCK VOLUNTEERS -
OUR FIRST PRIORITY IS COUNTER SURVEILLANCE. WE'RE SETTING A CHARGE HERE TO KNOCK OUT LANDLINES TO THE BLOCK.
IN ADDITION, I'VE POSITIONED JAMMERS AT STRATEGIC POINTS. THEY'LL TAKE OUT CAMERAS FOR A WIDE RADIUS AROUND THE TARGET. JUDGES'LL KNOW SOMETHING'S UP, BUT THEY WON'T KNOW WHAT.
TWO MINUTES. GET READY. WE GO IN TWO.
READY TO BLOW, COLONEL.
IN AND OUT QUICK AS WE CAN. THAT'S THE PLAN. SET THE EXPLOSIVES, GET OUT OF THERE AND BLOW 'EM TO F.E.A.G.'. NONE OF THIS PUSS-FOOTING AROUND. YOU WANT TO KILL MUTIES. THINK BIG.
SURE, THERE MAY BE A LITTLE COLLATERAL DAMAGE TO OTHER ATTACKING FORCES, BUT MOST OF THEM ARE LOWLIFE SCUM ANYWAY, SO WHO CARES? TWO BIRDS WITH ONE STONE, FAR AS I'M CONCERNED.
SPIKE CHESNEY, LEGION OF HATE -
VUGGIN' MUTIES! GONNA VUGGIN' KILL 'EM! GONE KILL 'EM! VUGGIN' KILL VUGGIN' MUTIES!
HATE
HATE
HAVE ANOTHER SHORT MAN.
JUDGES INSPIRED A DEEP-ROOTED FEAR IN THE RESIDENTS OF NORMA JEAN BAKER.
THEY HADN'T ALWAYS BEEN THEIR SO-CALLED FRIENDS AND PROTECTORS. MEMORIES OF OTHER DEALINGS WITH MEGA-CITY'S FINEST WERE SCORED TOO DEEP AND TOO RAW TO EASILY FORGET.

INDEED, TO DO SO WOULD BE NAIVE. THEY WERE **CITIZENS** NOW, AND THE JUDGES WOULD SHOW THEM NO MORE **FAVOUR** THAN ANY OTHER -- WHICH WAS PRECIOUS **LITTLE.**
LOOK I DON'T KNOW WHAT GOT INTO ME... I'VE NEVER HAD KNEEPADS BEFORE, I JUST GOT THIS URGE TO... TO...
SHUT UP.
DREDD MADE A DETOUR VIA THE TERRACE. HE HAD AN UNEASY FEELING THAT ALL WAS NOT RIGHT TONIGHT. **SOMETHING** WAS BREWING...
BEGIN JAMMING!
JAMMERS ON!
JAMMERS ON!
JAMMERS ON!

A HIGH-PITCHED SCREAM IN HIS HELMET SENSORS --
VAROOM
LANDLINES GONE! LET'S MOVE!
GO GEDDEM!
NO PRISONERS!
GONNA BAG ME A MUTIE!
WH-WHAT'S GOING ON?
MAGNIFY!
MAG x10
DROKK!

NOW HE UNDERSTOOD THE JAMMING, AND THE **GANG INCIDENT** THAT HAD DRAWN THE SECURITY DETAIL FROM NORMA JEAN BAKER. CLEARLY A WELL-ORGANISED ASSAULT.
ONE THAT CALLED FOR THE MAXIMUM DETERRENT.
HI-EX.
BOOM
SIGNALS MIGHT NOT GET THROUGH THE ELECTRONIC WHINE, BUT A **PITCHED BATTLE** COULD NOT FAIL TO ATTRACT ATTENTION —
ZIG ZAGUO BLOOD MEMBER, VIOLENT BOYS —
I'M HALFWAY ACROSS THE SLAB, MAN, NEXT THING I'M FLYIN' THROUGH THE AIR **WITHOUT** AN **ASS!**
THAT'S RIGHT. BLEW IT CLEAN **OFF**, MAN! THEY'RE GONNA MAKE ME A BRAND NEW ONE — FOAM AND PLASTEEL. WORKS BETTER THAN THE REAL THING.
THEN, THEY'RE GONNA PLONK MY BRAND NEW **ASS** IN AN **ISO-CUBE** FOR THE NEXT TWENNY YEARS!

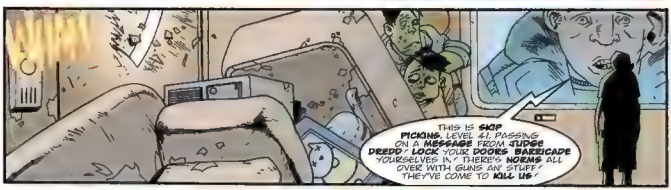
ENDELL WEHN
ANARCHY IN ACTION —
EXCELLENT.
MY PART IS FINISHED. IT REMAINS ONLY TO STAND BACK AND ENJOY THE FRUITS OF MY LABOURS. WHATEVER THE OUTCOME NOW, THE FORCES OF CHAOS CANNOT LOSE.
GO! GO! GO!
OUR CALCULATIONS INDICATE THE BEST SPOT TO PLACE THE CHARGES IS AT THE BASE OF TIER TWO. THE WEIGHT OF THE COLLAPSING UPPER LEVELS WILL CRUSH ANYTHING BELOW. WE'RE LOOKING FOR MAXIMUM BODY COUNT HERE.
LAST HI-EX!
BOOM
SKY SURFERS -

NEXT PROG > SKY HIGH!

DREDD ALONE IS AT NORMA JEAN BAKER BLOCK TO RESIST AN ALL-OUT ASSAULT BY CRAZED ANTI-MUTANT PROTESTORS --
SKYSURFERS!
HEAT SEEKERS!
JUDGE DREDD
MUTIE BLOCK
AHHHHH!
THERE IS NO DOUBT IN HIS MIND THIS IS A WELL-ORGANISED ATTEMPT TO SLAUGHTER THE ENTIRE BLOCK -- GENETIC CLEANSING ON A GRAND SCALE.
GET BACK TO YOUR APARTMENT. ISSUE A WARNING ON THE BLOCK SYSTEM -- RESIDENTS TO STAY IN THEIR HOMES. BARRICADE THEIR DOORS.
Y--YES, SIR!
SCRIPT
ART
COLOURS
LETTERS

TOOT HORNABY. SEVENTEEN. WEST SECTOR GANG ALLIANCE --
BODIES EVERYWHERE! DIDN'T FIGGER ON RUNNIN' INTO NO HI-EX --
THE REST OF 'EM TOO HIGH ON DEVIL DUST TO THINK STRAIGHT. BUT NOT THIS JIVE, MAN. I'M OUTA HERE!
WELCOME TA THE MEG, YOU MUTIE SCUM!
ELIJD BOYDEN. SICK THINGS --
"YOU GOTTA HAVE SOMEONE TO HATE KNOW WHAT I'M SAYIN'? USED TO BE THE DULTS AN' THE SPUGS AN' THE SKYSCUM AN' JUST ABOUT ANYBODY ELSE THAT COME ALONG. NOW IT'S THE MUTIES - AN' THERE AIN'T NOTHIN' LOWER THAN A MUTIE. CITY OUGHTA GIVE US A MEDAL!"

WASTIN' OUR TIME! THIS ONE'S DEAD!
OPEN THE **DOOR**, MUTIE! WE GOT SOMETHING **FOXXX** YOUUU!

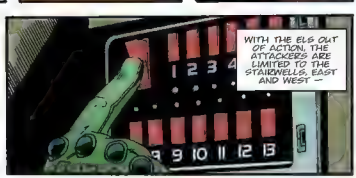

THIS IS **SKIP** PICKING, LEVEL 42, PASSING ON A **MESSAGE** FROM **JUDGE DREDD**: LOCK YOUR **DOORS**, **BARRICADE** YOURSELVES IN! THERE'S **NORMS** ALL OVER WITH GUNS AND STUFF! THEY'VE COME TO **KILL US!**

THEY'RE COMING UP THE **ELS!**
CONTROL, IF YOU CAN HEAR ME, WE HAVE A MAJOR SITUATION HERE!

HE IS SPARING WITH HIS AMMUNITION.

FIVE SHOTS, FIVE CLEAN KILLS.
HE MAY NEED EVERY BULLET BEFORE THIS IS OVER.

ELEVATOR CONTROLS
JUSTICE DEPT. ONLY


WITH THE ELS OUT OF ACTION, THE ATTACKERS ARE LIMITED TO THE STAIRWELLS, EAST AND WEST —
1 2 3 4
9 9 10 11 12 13

HE CAN DO NOTHING YET ABOUT THE SUFFERS ON THE LEPSE LEVELS. HE CAN ONLY TRY TO LIMIT THE CARNAGE UNTIL REINFORCEMENTS ARRIVE.
HE HEARS THEM BELOW, AND HE HURRIES TO MEET THEM --
LONG WAY TO COME FOR A TRIP TO REPTIK BOY!!.
=HEEE
RICOCHET!
DUD

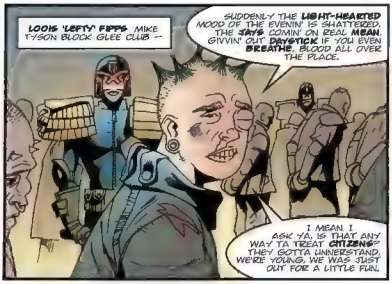
ANOTHER LEVEL DOWN AND HE RUNS INTO A FIRESTORM —
BUDDA
BDOW
THEIR NUMBERS ARE SWELLING TOO MANY TO HOLD BACK WITH DWINDLING AMMUNITION —
WATCH IT —!
THAT'LL BLOCK ACCESS TO THE UPPER LEVELS FOR A WHILE. **EAST** STAIRS NOW!

IS IT ALL RIGHT TO COME --
NO! INSIDE!
ELWYN GUNTER, CONTROL ROOM SUPERVISOR --
WE KNEW SOMETHING WAS WRONG AS SOON AS THE CAMS WENT DOWN. REPORTS OF EXPLOSIONS WERE COMING IN. I PUT OUT AN EMERGENCY ALL UNITS AND DESPATCHED AN H-WAGON. FROM THE PICTURES THEY SENT BACK IT WAS CLEAR WE HAD A PROBLEM.
IT'S ALL-OUT WAR ON NORMA JEAN BAKER!
AT THAT TIME I DIDN'T KNOW WE HAD AN OFFICER IN THE BLOCK. I HAD UNITS ASSEMBLE IN BAKER PLAZA TILL WE HAD A FORCE SUFFICIENT FOR THE TASK.
DON'T GET ME WRONG. I'M NO MUTANT LOVER. IF YOU ASK ME, RE-ADMITTING THEM WAS A MAJOR MISTAKE. BUT THIS IS A SIMPLE MATTER OF LAW AND ORDER. MOB LAW CANNOT BE TOLERATED.
TAKE 'EM DOWN!

NEXT PROG > GOODBYE, NORMA JEAN!

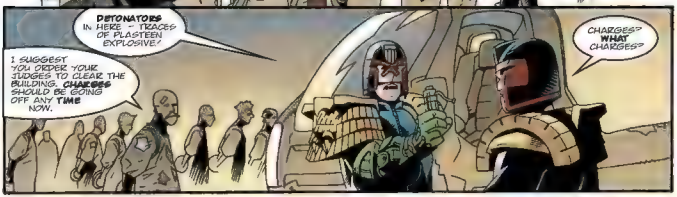
HE HAS NO HI-EX AND NO ISPASE CHARGES. EVEN STANDARD EXECUTION ARE RUNNING LOW
HE KNOWS THAT IF THE DRUG-CRAZED MOB GETS PAST HIM THERE WILL BE FURTHER CARNAGE AMONG THE MUTANTS OF NORMA JEAN BAKER BLOCK --
INCENDIARY!
JUDGE DREDD
MUTIE BLOCK
STORY JOHN WAGNER
ART KEV WALKER
COLOURS CHRIS BUTLER
LETTERS ANNIE PARKHOUSE
THAT PUT THE FEAR OF THE LAW INTO THEM --
SCRAMOLA!
Bshhhhh
A SCAVENGED BLASTER A MITEON 40 --

GOOD WEAPON IN A CRISIS -
BOOM BA-DOOM BOOM
NO TIME OR CALL FOR FINESSE...
YOU BREAK THE LAW. YOU PAY THE PRICE.
THE RADIO CRACKLES INTO LIFE. HE KNOWS THEY'VE FOUND THE JAMMERS -
THIS IS DREDD. I'M ON LEVEL 7 BAKER BLOCK. I'M HOLDING ATTACKERS BELOW THIS POINT. BUT YOU GOT SKYSURFERS IN THE UPPER LEVELS!
SITUATION UNDER CONTROL, DREDD. WE'RE IN BLOCK.

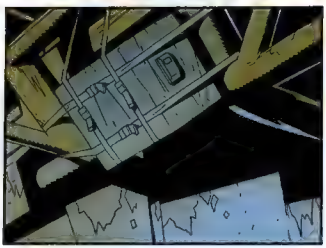

LOOIS 'LEFTY' FIPPS, MIKE TYSON BLOCK GLEE CLUB --
SUDDENLY THE LIGHT-HEARTED MOOD OF THE EVENIN' IS SHATTERED. THE JAYS COMIN' ON REAL MEAN, GIVVIN' OUT DRYDICK IF YOU EVEN BREATHE. BLOOD ALL OVER THE PLACE.
I MEAN, I ASK YA, IS THAT ANY WAY TA TREAT CITIZENS? THEY GOTTA UNNERSTAND, WE'RE YOUNG, WE WAS JUST OUT FOR A LITTLE FUN.

MOVE.
SPONK

COLONEL ARNIE OAKLEY, ARCHIBALD LEACH BLOCK VOLUNTEERS --
WE TOOK TOO LONG SETTING THE CHARGES. THEY STORMED US AT THE PLAZA PERIMETER. I ORDERED THE VOLUNTEERS TO SURRENDER. OF COURSE, WE'RE NOT OUT TO KILL JUDGES.
I'M CONFIDENT THAT WHEN THEY'VE HAD TIME TO REFLECT WE'LL BE RELEASED ON A CAUTION -- AT WORST, A SPELL OF BLOCK DETENTION. WE'RE NOT CRIMINALS. JUST DECENT CITIZENS STANDING UP FOR OUR RIGHTS.


DETONATORS IN HERE -- TRACES OF PLASTEEN EXPLOSIVE?
I SUGGEST YOU ORDER YOUR JUDGES TO CLEAR THE BUILDING. CHARGES SHOULD BE GOING OFF ANY TIME NOW.
CHARGES? WHAT CHARGES?

TIER TWO, THE FOUR CORNERS, SHOULD BE ENOUGH TO BRING THE WHOLE BUILDING DOWN.
AND IT'S GOODBYE NORMA JEAN.

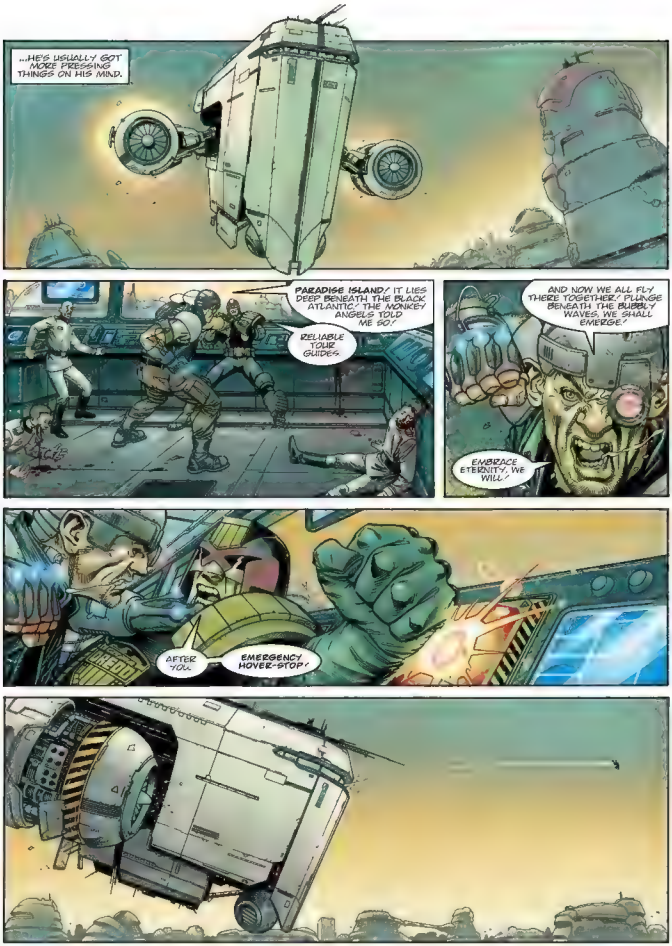


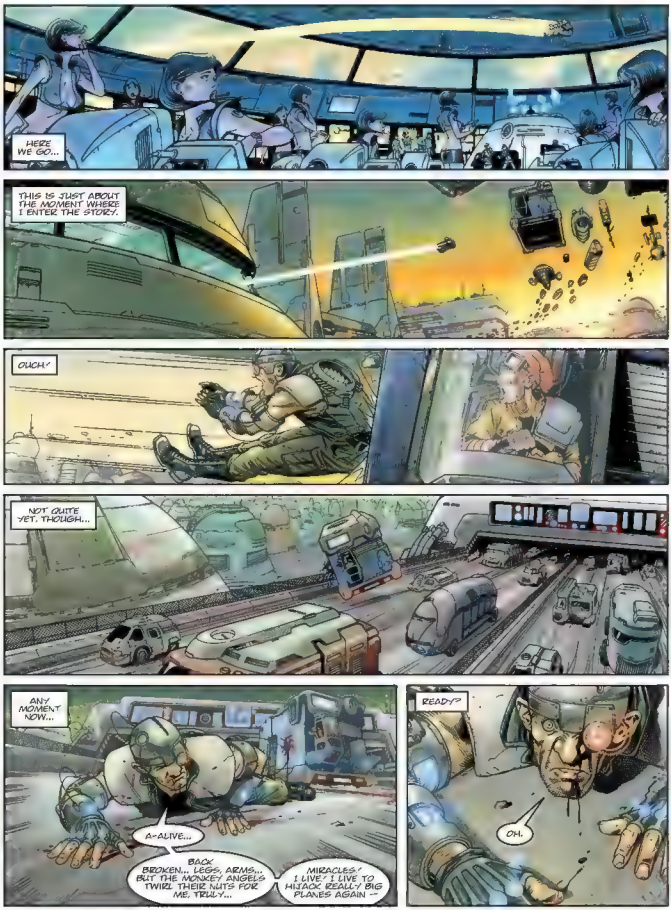
BAWOOMMM
BAWOOMMM
DRDDKK!
BADOOMM
MAWWWWWW!
IT'S GOING -- IT'S GOING --
SWEET GRUD --
I DON'T BELIEVE IT!

IT'S STILL STANDING!
EVACUATE NOEMA JEAN BAKER.
DON'T UNDERSTAND IT. WENT OVER THOSE CALCULATIONS TIME AND AGAIN...

IMPATIENCE WATSON
HOUSING DEPT --
WELL, ALL A LITTLE SELF-DEFEATING, WASN'T IT? WE'RE JUST GOING TO HAVE TO CLEAR ANOTHER BLOCK TO HOUSE THE NORMA JEANERS AND THAT WILL PUT MORE NORMAL CITIZENS' NOSES OUT OF JOINT.
HONESTLY, SOMETIMES I WONDER WHY WE BOTHER. WE DECENT CITIZENS SHOULD ALL JUST MOVE OUT AND LEAVE THEM TO IT.
MEDI-DROID PARA-1359, EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM --
WE'VE HAD ABOUT TWO HUNDRED AND SIXTY BODIES SO FAR. ATTACKERS AND RESIDENTS. WE'RE TAKING LO-8 AND SHIPPING THEM STRAIGHT OVER TO RESYK. AS DISASTERS GO, I SUPPOSE YOU'D RATE THIS ABOUT AN 8.
IF YOU'RE GIVEN TO THAT SORT OF THING.
AND I'M NOT.
OVER A KAY AWAY AND AN ONLOOKEE GETS CRUSHED BY THE BLAST DEBRIS.
GOING TO NEED A MEAT WAGON CONTROL.
ENDELL WENN, RESIDENT WATT TYLER.
INNOCENT BYSTANDER. HOW'S THAT FOR PURE DUMB BAD LUCK?
JOE DREDD
JUDGE --
I'M ALL FINISHED HERE, CONTROL.
ROG. GO TO CORNER TWELFTH AND DAVE. CITIZEN CAUGHT IN THE APE CHUTE.
ON MY WAY!
THE END

JUDGE DREDD
MEAT
BIKE CANNON!
YOU KNOW THIS GUY, RIGHT?
YOU KNOW WHAT HE DOES?
DUD WILLIAMS
WRITER
DYLAN TEAGUE
ART
ANNIE PARKHOUSE
LETTERS
RICOCHET!
I KNOW WHAT HE DOES.
BOOT KNIFE!
I KNOW WHAT HE REALLY IS.
I NEVER USED TO BUT...
ENORMO-CRANE!
HE'S BECOME VERY IMPORTANT IN MY LIFE, YOU SEE.
WE'VE MET OFTEN...
TOO OFTEN, I'VE COME TO REALISE.
MUTIE-PORCUPINE!
HE WOULDN'T RECOGNISE ME, THOUGH.
BUT, Y'KNOW, THAT'S COOL...


...HE'S USUALLY GOT MORE PRESSING THINGS ON HIS MIND.
PARADISE ISLAND? IT LIES DEEP BENEATH THE BLACK ATLANTIC. THE MONKEY ANGELS TOLD ME SO?
RELIABLE TOUR GUIDES.
AND NOW WE ALL FLY THERE TOGETHER? PLUNGE BENEATH THE BUBBLY WAVES. WE SHALL EMERGE?
EMBRACE ETERNITY. WE WILL?
AFTER YOU.
EMERGENCY HOVER-STOP?


HERE WE GO...
THIS IS JUST ABOUT THE MOMENT WHERE I ENTER THE STORY.
OUCH!
NOT QUITE YET, THOUGH...
ANY MOMENT NOW...
A-ALIVE...
BACK BROKEN... LEGS, ARMS... BUT THE MONKEY ANGELS TWIRL THEIR NUTS FOR ME. TRULY...
MIRACLES! I LIVE! I LIVE TO HIJACK REALLY BIG PLANES AGAIN --
READY?
OH.

SQUELCH!
MEAT WAGON!
AND HERE I COME.

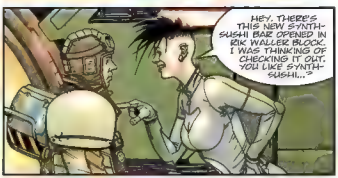
MY NAME IS HENRY BLANCH.
AND I CLEAN UP THE DEAD IN MEGA-CITY ONE.
I BROUGHT THE BIG SPATULA.
LEAVE IT TO US, DEED.
GOOD TO BE WORKING TOGETHER AGAIN.

I LOVE MY JOB... MOST OF THE TIME.
YOU GET TO SEE SOME PRETTY INTERESTING THINGS.
AND WE MIGHT NOT BE JUDGES, BUT MEAT-WAGON CREWS GET TO CARRY A BLASTER AND ARE TRAINED TO USE IT.
I ENJOY THE SENSE OF POWER THAT GIVES ME.
PROTECTION'S NECESSARY, BUT IT WON'T ALWAYS SAVE YOU.
IN THIS CITY, DEATH CAN COME IN ALL SORTS OF WAYS.
PEOPLE ASK ME IF IT'S DEPRESSING...
...BUT WE ALL DIE SOMETIME.
RIGHT?
UNTIL THEN...
I'VE GOT THINGS TO LIVE FOR.
HI, NEIGHBOUR.

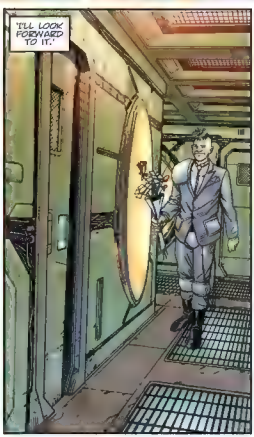
OH, HI BETH.
WORKING LATE AGAIN, HENRY?
YOU KNOW IT. HOW'S THE RUNNING GOING?
REAL GOOD. STILL AIMING FOR THE MEGA-CITY MARATHON. THAT'S THE GOAL. TWENTY MILES TODAY. ENERGISES ME. YKNOW?

REMINDS YOU YOU'RE ALIVE HUH?
YEAH. THAT'S KINDA WHAT MY WORK DOES FOR ME.

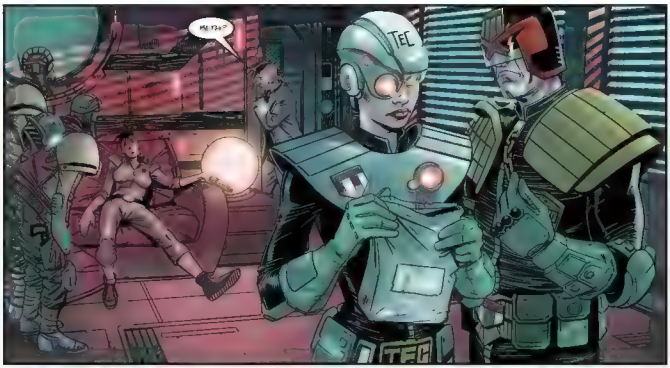
..WOW.
YOU HAVE HIDDEN DEPTHS, HENRY BLANCH.


HEY. THERE'S THIS NEW S-YNTH-SUSHII BAR OPENED IN BIK WALLER BLOCK. I WAS THINKING OF CHECKING IT OUT. YOU LIKE S-YNTH-SUSHI...?

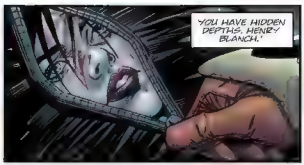
'YEAH, I LIKE SYNTH-SUSHI.'
'GREAT. THURSDAY SOUND GOOD?' SAY. EIGHT-ISH?'
'THURSDAY AT EIGHT.'


'I'LL LOOK FORWARD TO IT.'

BETH?
YOU READY? IT'S HENRY...

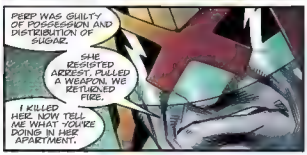

MEAT?
TEC
TEC

WOW


YOU HAVE HIDDEN DEPTHS, HENRY BLANCH.'

MEAT-WAGON CREW COMING THROUGH!'

SHE'S **NOT** MEAT.' SHE'S **BETH.**' **BETH CASSIDY.**' AND SHE JOGS AND SHE'S SWEET AND SHE LIVES DOWN THE CORRIDOR FROM ME.'
WHAT THE DROOK ARE YOU STILL **DOING** HERE. JUST STANDING AROUND? YOU'VE GOT TO FIND HER KILLER.'


PEEP WAS GUILTY OF POSSESSION AND DISTRIBUTION OF SUGAR.
SHE RESISTED ARREST, PULLED A WEAPON. WE RETURNED FIRE.
I KILLED HER. NOW TELL ME WHAT YOU'RE DOING IN HER APARTMENT.

WE... WE HAD A... A DATE.
AND THAT'S WHEN IT HAPPENED.
THAT'S WHEN I REALISED...
ALL THESE YEARS...
HOW MANY TIMES HAVE I SEEN JUDGE DREDD IN PERSON?
HOW MANY DEAD BODIES HAVE I CLEANED UP AFTER JUDGE DREDD?
JUST HOW MANY HUMAN BEINGS HAS HE KILLED?
AFTER THAT DAY — WHEN I RECEIVED THE KNOWLEDGE — THINGS JUST WEREN'T THE SAME FOR ME.
I TRIED TO LOSE MYSELF IN THE JOB. TRIED TO FIND A SENSE OF JOY IN WHAT I DID, BUT THE OLD STUFF? THE THINGS THAT MADE ME FEEL AN INNER SPARK BEFORE...
...NONE OF THAT WORKED
I COULDN'T GET THAT ONE THOUGHT OUT OF MY HEAD:
HOW MANY HUMAN BEINGS HAS HE KILLED?
SO I STARTED TO DO SOME RESEARCH. TO DIG INTO HIS PAST.
AND HOLY GOLD ALMIGHTY...
YOU'RE TALKING HALF A BILLION WITH EAST-MEG ONE ALONE. HAS ANY SINGLE HUMAN BEING EVER BEEN RESPONSIBLE FOR SO MUCH MURDER?
HE IS THE ANGEL OF BLOCKING DEATH.

SO IT BECAME CLEAR TO ME WHAT I HAD TO DO.
I'LL WAIT FOR MY MOMENT.
I'M NOT STUPID.
BUT THERE'LL BE A MEAT WAGON CALL EVENTUALLY. AND HE'LL BE THERE.
CRISIS OVER.
FRESH FROM HIS LATEST KILL.
HIS GUARD DOWN.
I'LL DROP THE BIG SPATULA.
...AND THEN I'LL DO IT.
HENRY?
UH... WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

DREDD!
DON'T MOVE A DROOKING MUSCLE!
I HAVE... I HAVE SOMETHING I WANT TO SAY TO YOU, DREDD!
SOMETHING IMPORTANT I WANT YOU TO KNOW BEFORE I SHOOT!
HA!
YOU WON'T ADD ME TO YOUR LIST!
YOUR BIG LIST OF DEATH!
I'M HENRY BLANCH.
AND WE ALL DIE SOMETIME RIGHT?
MEAT WAGON!

THE END

MEET JUDGE DREDD

In Mega-City One, harsh and crazy future metropolis, he is The Law!

MUTIE BLOCK

The set-up: Inside the fortified walls of Mega-City One, that vast and mean-spirited East Coast urban sprawl, bored and bonkers citizens are crammed into giant blocks, each the size of a conventional town. Rarely do any of these towering people jams remain peaceful for long.
What's going on here? The Mega-City's draconian laws against mutants – humans warped through living in the post-nuclear rad-lands outside the city walls – have been relaxed. The muties are coming home.
Tell me more: John Wagner – Judge Dredd's chief biographer since the character's late 70s debut – is a master of funny, brutal twists on modern life, this is a typically brilliant take on the world outside our windows.
Written by: John Wagner
Art by: Kev Walker

MEAT

The set-up: A city of unimaginable size will have unimaginable problems, and death (often violent, usually bizarre) is a constant neighbour to every citizen. Some, however, hold it much closer to their hearts than others.
What's going on here? Dredd's relentless pursuit of 'the Law' can leave quite the mess in his wake and somebody's got to help clean it up. Introducing Henry Blanch, just a guy doing his job.
Tell me more: Despite being prolific as anything, Wagner can't write every *Dredd* – which is where guys like Rob Williams come in. This is a typical done-in-one Dredd tale: vicious, snappy, blackly funny.
Written by: Rob Williams
Art by: Dylan Teague

GIANT-SIZE SIDEKICK

ISSUE No.1 OCT 2012

FREE WITH CYANIDE & HAPPINESS ISSUE 14

THE BEST NEW COMICS PREVIEWED INSIDE!

SELF MADE HERO

WWW.SELFMADEHERO.COM

LAUNCH ISSUE

MORE PAGES! THICKER COVERS! (JUST BETTER!)

FIRST LOOK!

THE NAO OF BROWN BY GLYN DILLON

THE BULLETPROOF COFFIN: DISINTERRED COMPLETE 22-PAGE ISSUE!

Plus

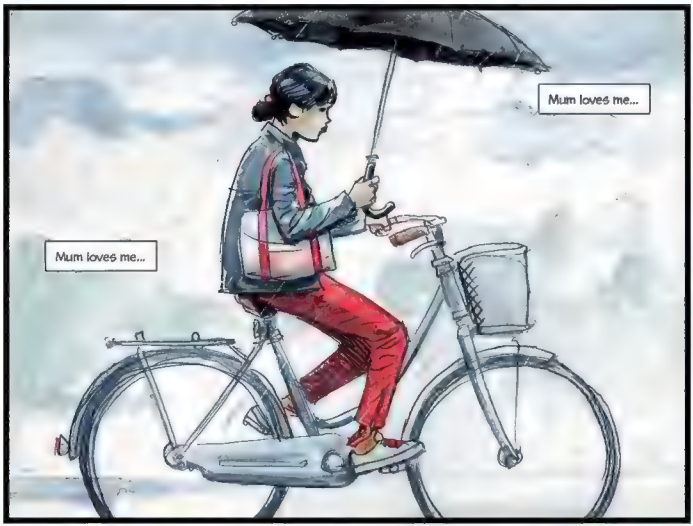
IT GIRL & THE ATOMICS

THE SILVER DARLINGS

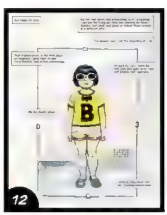
The Bulletproof Coffin Vol 2: Disinterred
Image Comics / Collection out now

GIANT-SIZE SIDEKICK
No.1 October 2012

Inside this issue...



It Girl & The Atomics



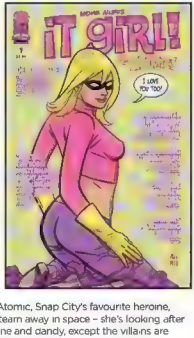
The Nao Of Brown

The Silver Darlings

Bulletproof Coffin: Disinterred

In this issue's Giant-Size Sidekick...

It Girl & The Atomics



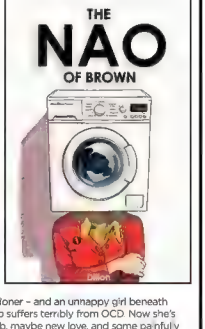
THE SET-UP: *Madman* is Mike Allred's playful, pop culture-tastic take on superheroes: a Frankenstein's monster-type zombie stitched back together and reanimated after a fatal car accident. Now he's got mild superpowers and has loopy, inventive adventures – along with his pals The Atomics, ex-villains now cured of the sick conditions that had made them evil!

WHAT'S GOING ON HERE? It Girl is a leading Atomic, Snap City's favourite heroine, and – with the rest of her team away in space – she's looking after business on her own. All fine and dandy, except the villains are crawling out of the woodwork, including The Skunk. And can our lass really trust benefactor Dr Flem...?

TELL ME MORE: This is a quirky, bouncy take on superheroes, one where little is quite as it seems..

Written by: Jamie S Rich, Mike Allred, Mike Norton
Drawn by: Mike Norton
Publisher: Image Comics
Read more: Issue #1 out now
Mike Allred
www.imagecomics.com

The Nao Of Brown



THE SET-UP: Mixing meditation, geek culture, a sympathetic, informed take on mental illness and a feels-like-you're-there version of specific London streets, *The Nao Of Brown* is a fantastical, realist, hugely accessible exploration of a life less ordinary, and the people this impacts upon. Romantic too!

WHAT'S GOING ON HERE? Nao is an artist/toy designer, a cute half-Japanese Londoner – and an unhappy girl beneath her bright veneer, one who suffers terribly from OCD. Now she's coming home, to a new job, maybe new love, and some painfully familiar problems...

TELL ME MORE: Glyn Dillon briefly shone at *Deadline* and Vertigo nearly 20 years ago, then disappeared from comics, now he's back, and with one of the most accomplished, exciting graphic novels of the year so far.

Written & drawn by: Glyn Dillon
Publisher: Self Made Hero
Read more: *The Nao Of Brown* graphic novel is out in September
Glyn Dillon
www.selfmadehero.com

The Silver Darlings

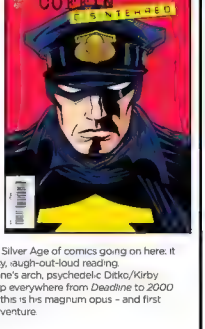
THE SET-UP: It's the late '60s in Ayrshire, Scotland, and keen young photog Danny is about to leave his hometown for Glasgow and college – but not before a last week of hard graft aboard dad's little fishing boat, The Silver Darling.

WHAT'S GOING ON HERE? Danny's all at sea, and he's made some mistakes: he's brought stuff on board he shouldn't have, and his deliberate challenges to sailor superstition are not going down well. Meanwhile, all around, the ocean is alive with fish.

TELL ME MORE: *The Silver Darlings* is a debut graphic novel from Will Morris; you can be sure it won't be his last. Certainly, it's strong on atmosphere – a dying industry, coming-of-age angst, the experience of life on the northern oceans rendered in ink-washed greys – and loaded with vague dread.

Written & drawn by: Will Morris
Publisher: Bank Slate Books
Read more: *The Silver Darlings* graphic novel is out now
Will Morris
www.bankslatebooks.co.uk

The Bulletproof Coffin



THE SET-UP: There's not been an odder, more striking comic in years – a collection of knowing, touching, gleefully in-your-face pulp fiction tales that mix Jack Kirby and William Burroughs.

WHAT'S GOING ON HERE? To kick off *Bulletproof*'s 'Second Season' we get the gloriously grotesque origin story of cop-superhero The Shield of Justice. There's sex, violence, lots of hard-boiled detective stuff and a whole meta-commentary on the Silver Age of comics going on here. It makes for essential, queasy, laugh-out-loud reading.

TELL ME MORE: Shaky Kane's arch, psychedelic Ditko/Kirby narratives have cropped up everywhere from *Deadline* to *2000 AD* over the decades, but this is his magnum opus – and first 'mainstream' American adventure.

Written by: David Hine
Drawn by: Shaky Kane
Publisher: Image Comics
Read more: *Bulletproof Coffin Vol 2: Disinterred* (graphic novel collection) is out now
David Hine/Shaky Kane
www.imagecomics.com

AAEEEEEEEE!
NOT SO FAST
GAHHH!
NO, NO, NO!

HOW ABOUT "YES"?
GUYS LIKE YOU NEED...
...A POSITIVE FEMALE INFLUENCE...
...TO SCHOOL YOU ON HOW TO PROPERLY TREAT A LADY
PURSE SNATCHING?
REALLY?
THAT'S SO 1970s NEW YORK.

IT GIRL!
AND THE
ATOMICS
IN
"DARK STREETS, SNAP CITY"
WRITTEN BY JAMES S. ROSS
ILLUSTRATED BY MARK RITCH
COLORS BY AARON PASSALAQUA
LETTERING BY CRANK!
CREATED BY MICHAEL ALFRED

HEY, HANDS OFF!
YOU SHOULDN'TA OUGHTA TOL'.
WHO SEZ I D'D?
DON'T LISTEN, WAH-WAH. THEY LIE!
ALL RIGHT, YOU PITBULLS. STEP AWAY FROM THE WEASEL!
IT GIRL IS HERE TO DO PEST CONTROL!

WHO SHE CALLIN A PEST?
I DO BELIEVE THAT WOULD BE US.
I DIDN'T NAME NAMES. THE DESCRIPTION JUST FIT.
WHMP
OOFA!
DRIVE.
FWP
DOGPILE!
LOOKS LIKE YOU BOYS ARE CONSIDERED DISPOSABLE

BUT THAT'S HOW LALA PLAYS THE GAME, ISN'T IT?
UGH.
AEEEEE!
VROOOM
GET IT TOGETHER!
WHOOSH
KONK
GAH!
BOMB
AWWW NUTS
BUT THAT DUDE WAS A SNITCH, NOT A CIVILIAN!
ENEMIES DEFEATED: 2
ENEMIES ESCAPED: 1
BYSTANDERS RESCUED: -1
MISSION STATUS:
FAILURE

THAT'S TOTALLY NOT FAIR
NOW I HAVE TO START ALL OVER!
WHO ARE YOU TALKING TO IN HERE?
NOBODY. THIS STUPID GAME
HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN ONLINE, PLAYING DARK STREETS?
YOUR ROOM'S GETTING FUNKY
I DON'T KNOW. WHAT ELSE AM I SUPPOSED TO DO?
ADAM AND FRANK AND THE BAND HAVE BEEN ON TOUR IN OUTER SPACE FOR MONTHS.
I'M BORED, DORRIE!

Hanging in the hallway of my Mum's house there's a photo of me in one of those cheap clip frames, aged thirteen. I'm wearing a pair of white seventies shades and a Binky Brown T-shirt that Mum made. She's a seamstress, so it doesn't have that home-made look... it just looks perfect.

Every boyfriend who's got as far as visiting my Mum's house has commented on how cute and cool I look in that photo. I always smile and accept the compliments graciously.

But inside I'm torn.

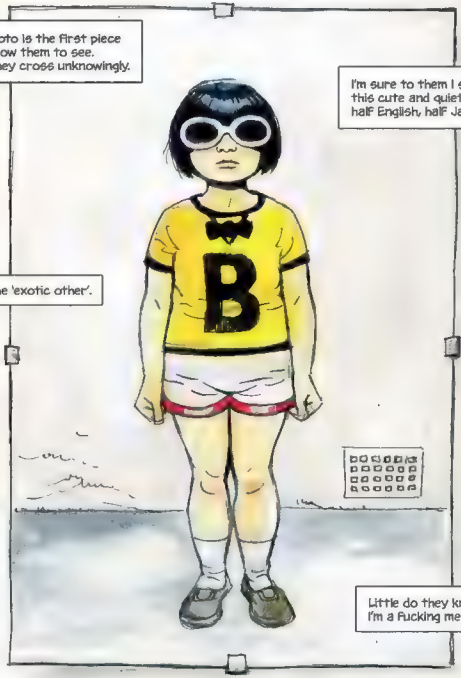
For me that photo has a heaviness to it... a sadness. I can see the funny girl they see, wearing her Mum's shades... but what was going on behind those shades is a different story.

The glasses were just the beginning of it all.

That framed photo is the first piece of 'evidence' I allow them to see. It's a Rubicon they cross unknowingly.

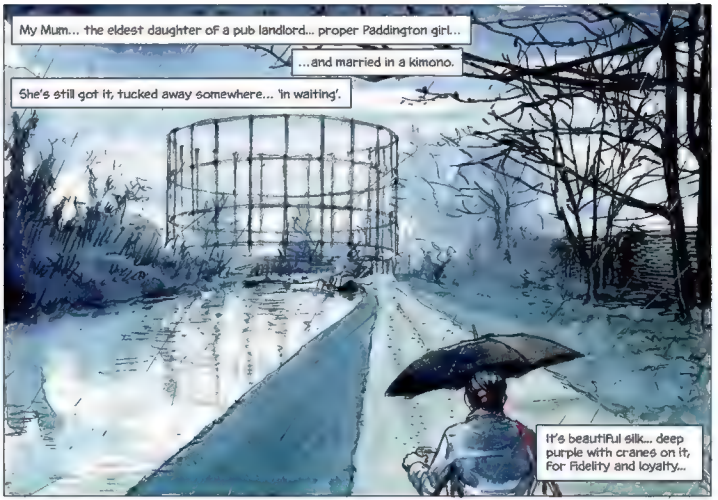
I'm sure to them I seem like this cute and quiet 'arty' type, half English, half Japanese...

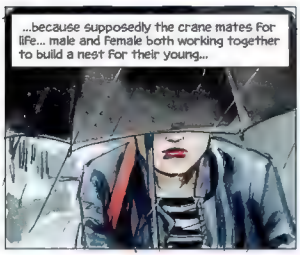
...I'm the 'exotic other'.



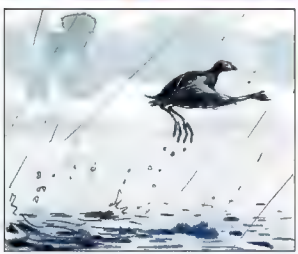
Little do they know that I'm a fucking mental case.

Mum loves me...
Mum loves me...
Mum loves me...

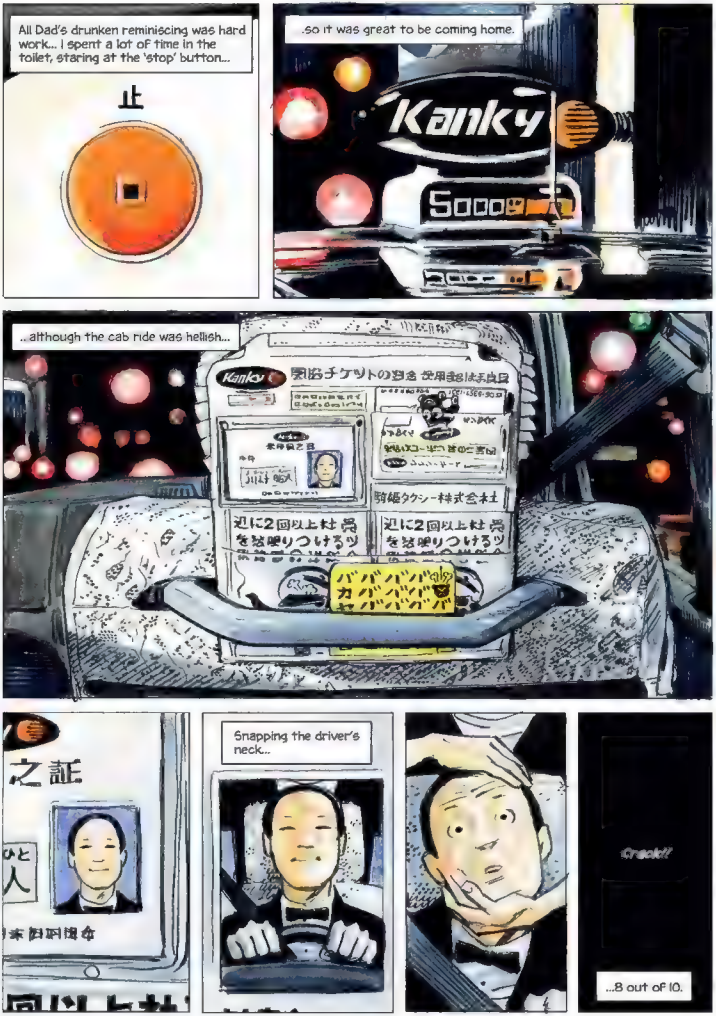

My Mum... the eldest daughter of a pub landlord... proper Paddington girl...
...and married in a kimono.
She's still got it, tucked away somewhere... 'in waiting'.
It's beautiful silk... deep purple with cranes on it, For Fidelity and loyalty...


...because supposedly the crane mates for life... male and female both working together to build a nest for their young...

Maybe that's why they're an endangered species these days.



It's funny to think of Dad as the 'exotic other'.

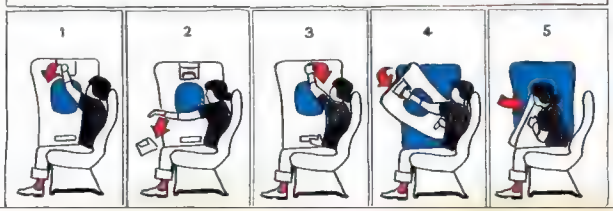

All Dad's drunken reminiscing was hard work... I spent a lot of time in the toilet, staring at the 'stop' button...
止
...so it was great to be coming home.
Kanky
5000
...although the cab ride was hellish...
Kanky
駒姫タクシー株式会社
Snapping the driver's neck...
Crack!!
...8 out of 10.

The plane was worse still...

Why did they sit me there?

And give me instructions?

Emergency opening



...9 out of 10.

Spent the rest of the flight in the toilet...

...but got distracted by the lock...

'When you lock the door the lights turn on... When you unlock the door the lights go off.'

'It's like being in a big fridge, but in reverse.'

'It's perfect, why should two things that always happen together (lock the door and turn the light on) be a two-step process?'

'Lock and light, one switch.... Good thinking. I wonder what bright spark thought of that.'

I was pleased that I'd had such a normal thought...

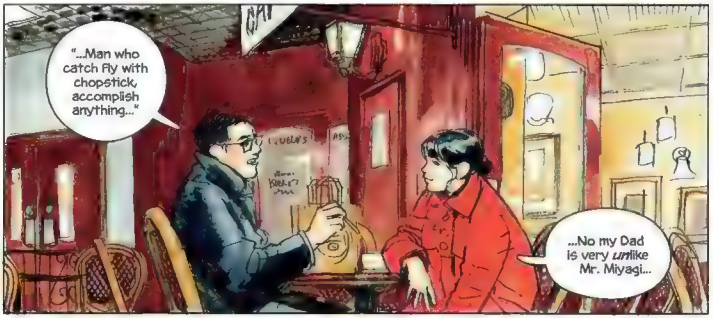
...but it still didn't ***feel right***...

'What am I doing?'

'I should never fly.'

'I'm dangerous.'
'I'm evil.'
'...Mum loves me...'
'I'm sick.'
'...Mum loves me...'
'Round and round...'
'Stop.'
'...Mum loves me...'
'Just...'
So exhausting.

I stopped for a hot chocolate...
I didn't have the strength to go from *that*, straight to the tube.
I must've looked like shit.
Is that 'The Nao of Brown'?
LIQUEURS
ASSIETTES
BIÈRES
SANDWICHS
COCKTAILS
Huh?
Hey...
Blimey, you look... tired.
Steve Meek!
Whoa!
...you okay?
Sorry. Hello...
What are you doing here?
Nice coat, very 'Buddusky'.

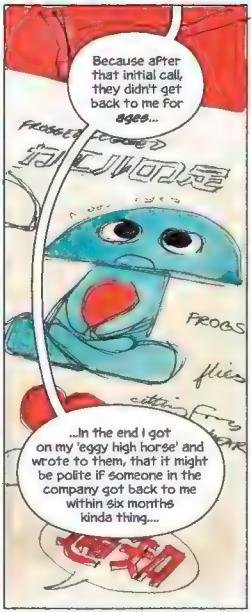

"...Man who catch fly with chopstick, accomplish anything..."
...No my Dad is very *un*like Mr. Miyagi...

...Mr Miyagi was loveable and wise, not an annoying...
...alcoholic.

I can't wait to go back again...
Why d'you go if you don't get along with him?

I dunno, 'reboot' I s'pose... I had some shitty luck... broke up with a shit boyfriend... so thought I'd try and 'turn it off and on again', come back and start fresh.
And I *do* love Japan.

How's work?
Well, the freelance stuff is going slowly, as usual, a few commissions here and there but not enough to live on, so my ex got me a job at his awful publishing company.
Oh! And I'd done a few bits for 'Boyrobot' actually, just some designs they were trying to work up. But it meant I had direct contact with 'Mr. Big'.
Ooh...
Exactly. Anyway I mailed him some of my toy designs... and he loved them, said he wanted to do them.

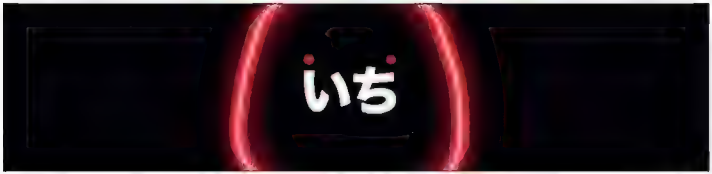

Because after that initial call, they didn't get back to me for ages...
FROGS
...In the end I got on my 'eggy high horse' and wrote to them, that it might be polite if someone in the company got back to me within six months kinda thing....

And...?
Well, I didn't think I'd been rude or anything so I was quite surprised by the speedy and hostile response I got.
Hostile?
Well, in my attempt to be professional yet curt... I'd signed off with just "regards"...
...but the G and T are pretty close to each other on the keyboard.

look forward to hearing

retards

Then the next day I found out my boyfriend was cheating on me...
...and before I could even say anything, HE dumped ME!
Grim. What an idiot.
I always knew your big sausage fingers would land you in trouble.
Very nice.
LIQUEURS
ASS 1777
Thank you.
Look, I gotta go... but I just had to sack a complete loon and I really need someone sane to do four days a week in the shop... would you even consider that?
At Peoploids?
Yeah, c'mon, we might even have some 'ichi' stuff you haven't seen.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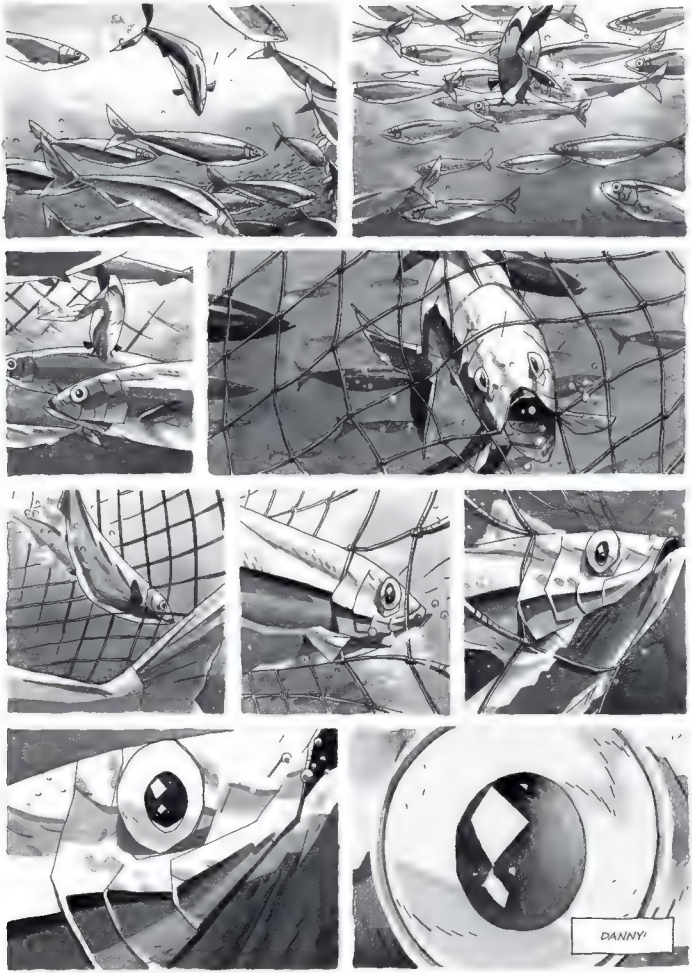
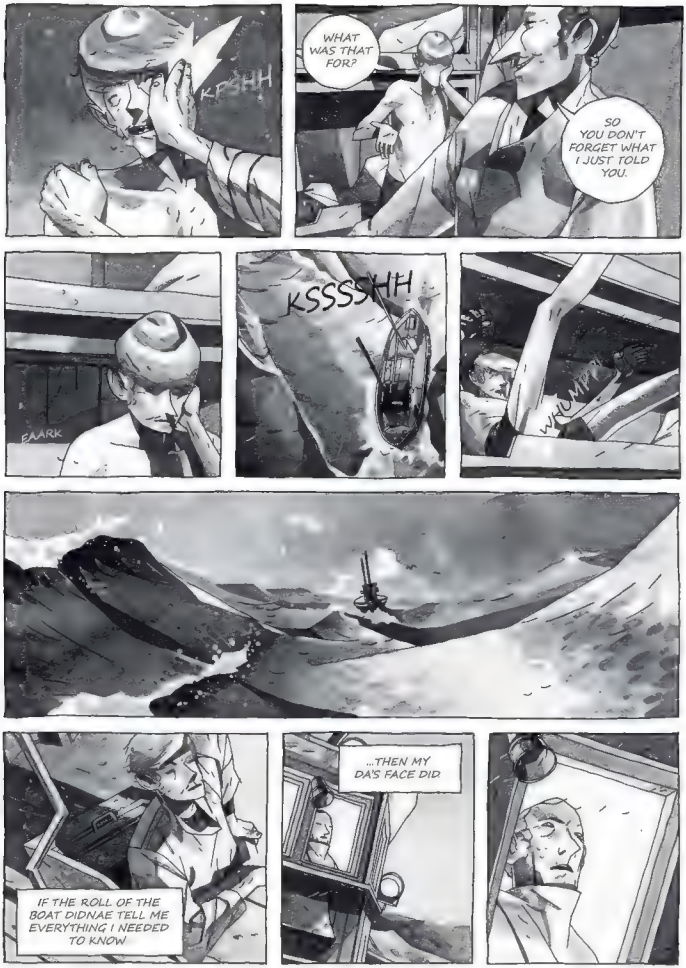
ichi

OURS WAS THE ONLY BOAT OUT OF THE HARBOUR THAT AFTERNOON, BUT I DIDNAE THINK TOO MUCH OF IT
I HAD MORE PRESSING MATTERS TO ATTEND TO.
WITH THE KNIFE BURIED DEEP BENEATH MY PILLOW, I FELL IMMEDIATELY TO SLEEP.


DANNY!

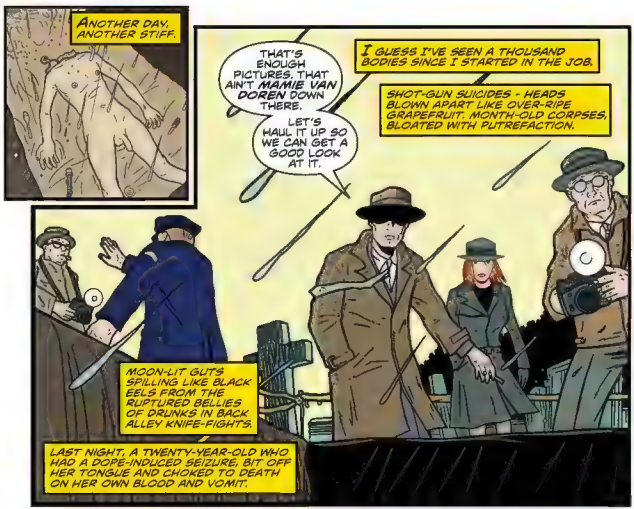
DANNY!
DANNY!
WHA?
A STORM'S BREWING.
WE NEED TO STOW THE NETS.
CSSSHH
EARRK
EEEARRK
KA-KK!
YOU DON'T WANT TO BE DOING THAT ON DECK, DAN.
REMEMBER, ALWAYS STAND AT RIGHT ANGLES TO THE BOAT'S ROLL.

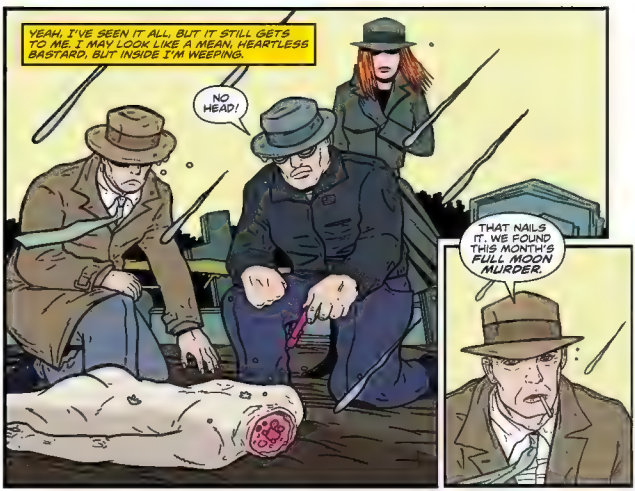

KPSHH
WHAT WAS THAT FOR?
SO YOU DON'T FORGET WHAT I JUST TOLD YOU.
BAARK
KSSSSHH
WHOMP
IF THE ROLL OF THE BOAT DIDNAE TELL ME EVERYTHING I NEEDED TO KNOW
...THEN MY DA'S FACE DID

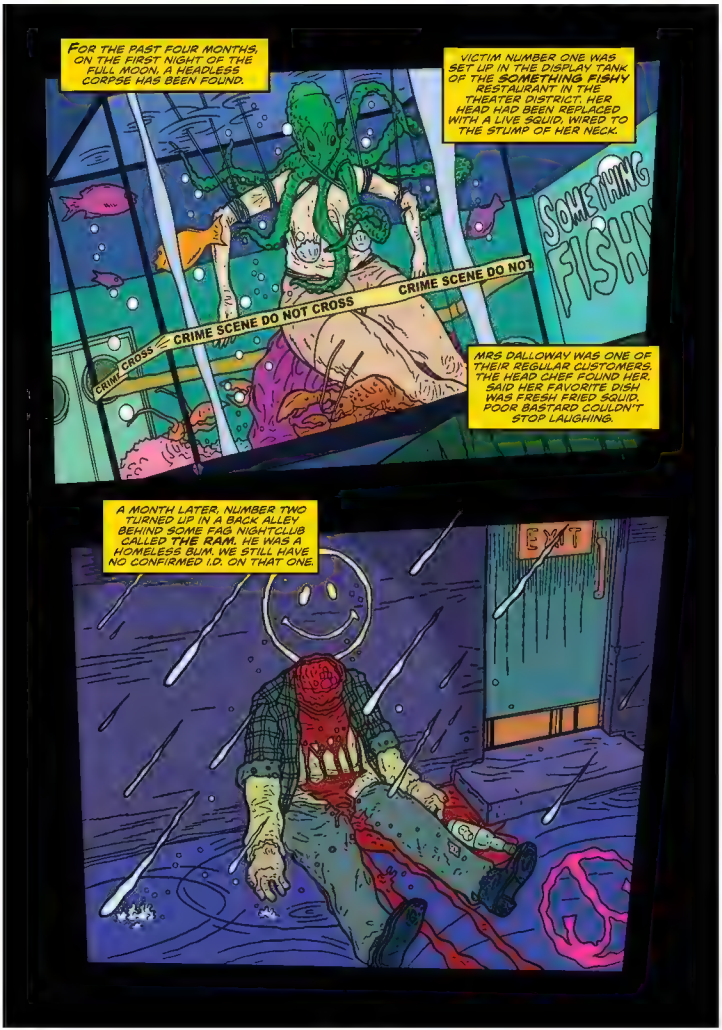
VURRRGHH
ACCKKK
:KAFF:
A GRAVEYARD! DID I MAKE A MISTAKE?
LOOKS LIKE I'M NOT THE ONLY ONE DIGGING THE GRAVEYARD SCENE. THIS IS THE PLACE ALL RIGHT!
CAN'T SEE TOO WELL THROUGH THIS RAIN. BUT THAT LOOKS LIKE...
THE UNFORGIVING EYE. AS I LIVE AND BREATHE.
MOVE IT, COFFIN FLY! WE HAVE TO GET OUT OF HERE BEFORE SOMEONE SPOTS US.

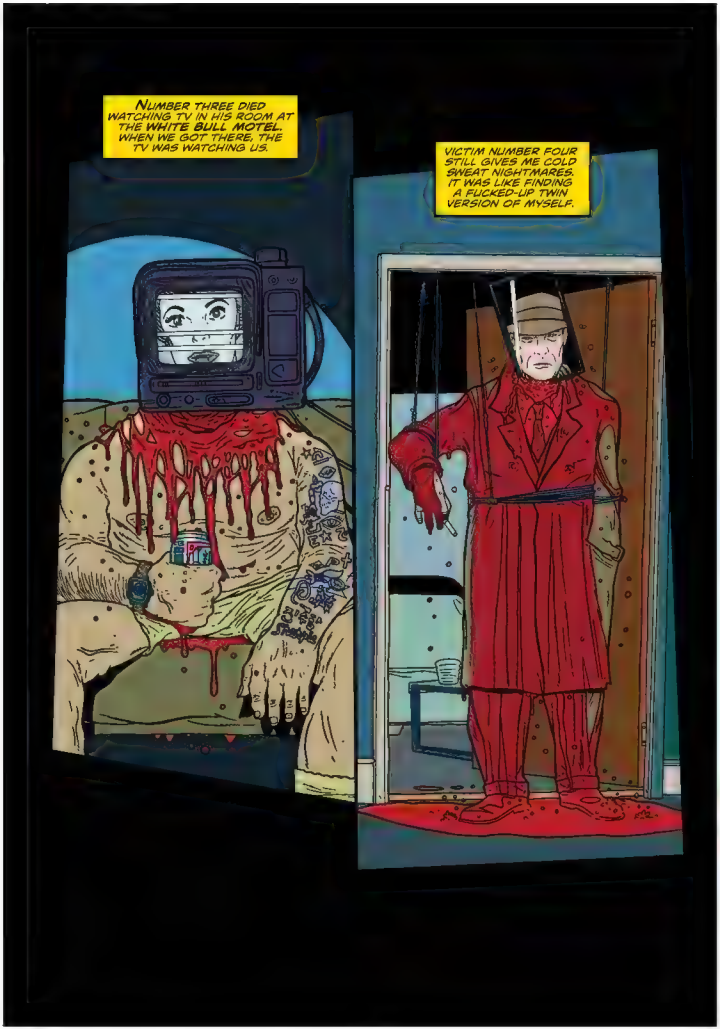
HELP ME FILL THIS HOLE. I DON'T WANT TO SPEND ALL NIGHT HERE.
HOW DO YOU THINK I FEEL? SEVEN YEARS I'VE BEEN --
-- WAIT! WHAT WAS THAT?!
VINCENT CHEYNEY
6.11.1933-7.3.1957
NOT DEAD BUT SLEEPING
SOMETHING MOVING OUT THERE...
FZZZASSH
URRK

WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING?
SORRY. REFLEX. THOUGHT I SAW SOMETHING.
THERE'S NOTHING THERE. PULL YOURSELF TOGETHER. WE HAVE URGENT BUSINESS TO ATTEND TO.
THE FATE OF THE HUMAN RACE HANGS IN THE BALANCE.
WELL WHADDAYA KNOW? AND HERE WAS ME THINKING YOU WERE PAYING ME A SOCIAL CALL.
FSSS


ANOTHER DAY, ANOTHER STIFF.
THAT'S ENOUGH PICTURES. THAT AIN'T MAMIE VAN DOREN DOWN THERE.
LET'S HAUL IT UP SO WE CAN GET A GOOD LOOK AT IT.
I GUESS I'VE SEEN A THOUSAND BODIES SINCE I STARTED IN THE JOB.
SHOT-GUN SUICIDES - HEADS BLOWN APART LIKE OVER-RIPE GRAPEFRUIT. MONTH-OLD CORPSES, BLOATED WITH PUTREFACTION.
MOON-LIT GUTS SPILLING LIKE BLACK EELS FROM THE RUPTURED BELLIES OF DRUNKS IN BACK ALLEY KNIFE-FIGHTS.
LAST NIGHT, A TWENTY-YEAR-OLD WHO HAD A DOPE-INDUCED SEIZURE, BIT OFF HER TONGUE AND CHOKED TO DEATH ON HER OWN BLOOD AND VOMIT.


YEAH, I'VE SEEN IT ALL, BUT IT STILL GETS TO ME. I MAY LOOK LIKE A MEAN, HEARTLESS BASTARD, BUT INSIDE I'M WEEPING.
NO HEAD!
THAT NAILS IT. WE FOUND THIS MONTH'S FULL MOON MURDER.

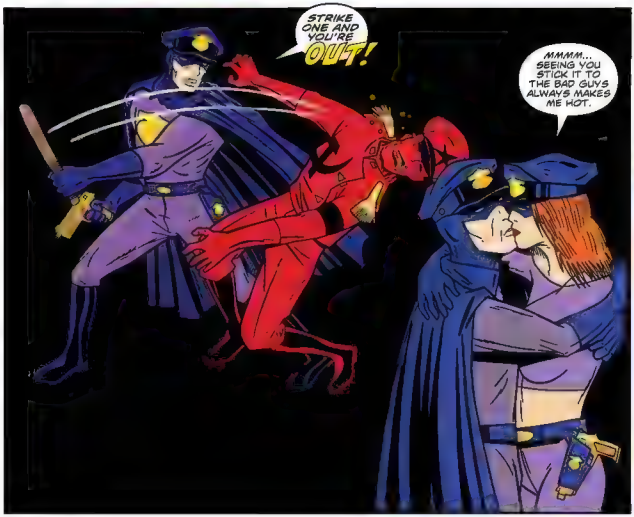

FOR THE PAST FOUR MONTHS, ON THE FIRST NIGHT OF THE FULL MOON, A HEADLESS CORPSE HAS BEEN FOUND.
VICTIM NUMBER ONE WAS SET UP IN THE DISPLAY TANK OF THE SOMETHING FISHY RESTAURANT IN THE THEATER DISTRICT. HER HEAD HAD BEEN REPLACED WITH A LIVE SQUID, WIRED TO THE STUMP OF HER NECK.
SOMETHING FISHY
CRIME SCENE DO NOT CROSS
CRIME SCENE DO NOT CROSS
CRIME SCENE DO NOT CROSS
MRS DALLOWAY WAS ONE OF THEIR REGULAR CUSTOMERS. THE HEAD CHEF FOUND HER. SAID HER FAVORITE DISH WAS FRESH FRIED SQUID. POOR BASTARD COULDN'T STOP LAUGHING.
A MONTH LATER, NUMBER TWO TURNED UP IN A BACK ALLEY BEHIND SOME FAG NIGHTCLUB CALLED THE RAM. HE WAS A HOMELESS BUM. WE STILL HAVE NO CONFIRMED I.D. ON THAT ONE.
EXIT


NUMBER THREE DIED WATCHING TV IN HIS ROOM AT THE WHITE BULL MOTEL. WHEN WE GOT THERE, THE TV WAS WATCHING US.
VICTIM NUMBER FOUR STILL GIVES ME COLD SWEAT NIGHTMARES. IT WAS LIKE FINDING A FUCKED-UP TWIN VERSION OF MYSELF.

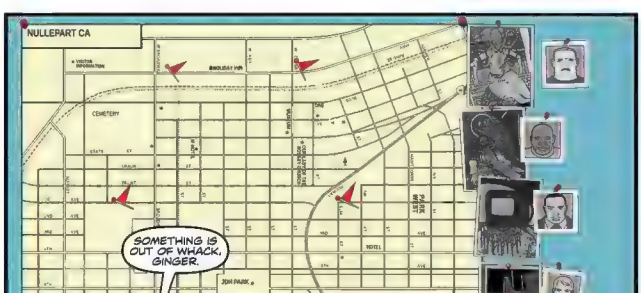
IT'S A DAY EARLY. FULL MOON IS TOMORROW.
THIS IS NEW. THE WOUND WAS BEEN CAUTERIZED AS IF --
-- AS IF HIS HEAD WAS VAPORIZED BY SOME KIND OF HIGH-POWERED LASER WEAPON.
YOU'VE BEEN READING TOO MANY COMIC BOOKS, JOHNNY.
MY NAME'S JOHNNY P. SARTRE. DETECTIVE. HOMICIDE.
THE DAME WITH THE FLAMING RED HAIR IS GINGER PALMER.
DON'T LET THE LOOKS FOOL YOU. SHE'S AS TOUGH AS NAILS AND AS SHARP AS A STILETTO. BEST PARTNER I EVER HAD.

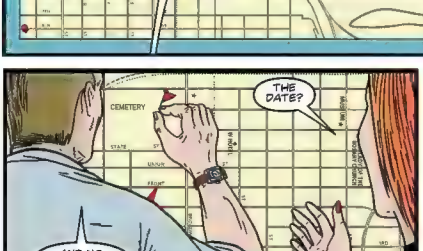
THE RED MENACE AND HIS HORDES OF MINDLESS UNION MEN ARE PLANNING TO STRIKE AT THE HEART OF OUR DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM!
THIS LOOKS LIKE A JOB FOR THE SHIELD AND LADY JUSTICE!
TO THE SHIELD MOBILE!
HOW D'YA LIKE THE TASTE OF AMERICAN LEAD YOU COMMIE CREEPS?!
THE ONLY GOOD RED IS A DEAD RED!

IT'S OVER, SHIELD!
WHEN MY MISSILE HITS THE WHITE HOUSE, LADY JUSTICE WILL DIE AND AMERICA WILL BE AT THE FEET OF THE RED MENACE!
NOT WHILE I'M STILL BREATHING, YOU LOUSY PINKO PERVERT.


STRIKE ONE AND YOU'RE OUT!
MMMM... SEEING YOU STICK IT TO THE BAD GUYS ALWAYS MAKES ME HOT.

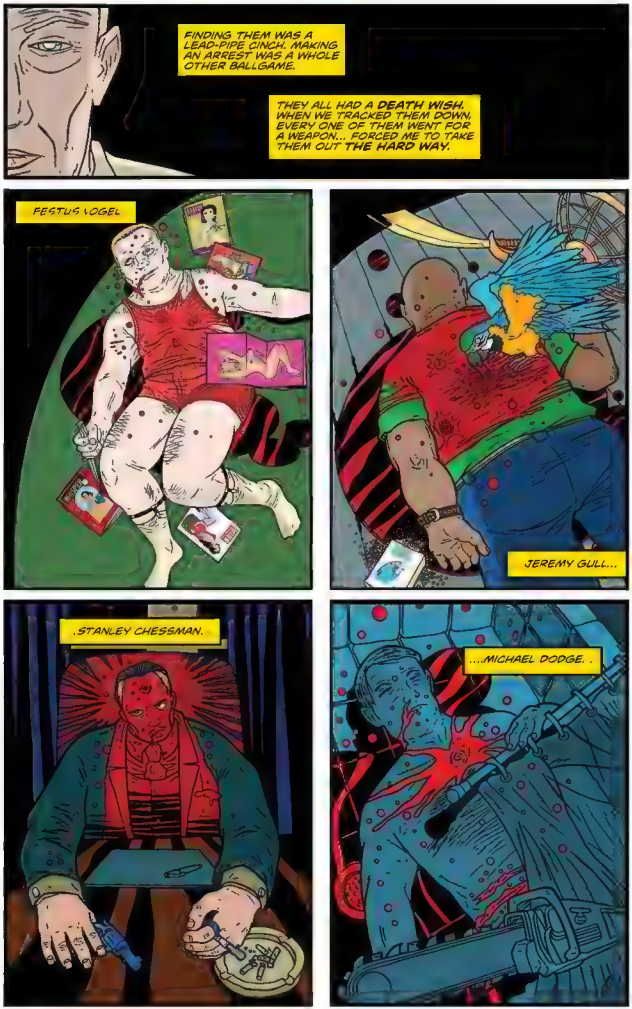
OH, SHIELD! TAKE ME...TAKE ME NOW!
SNAP OUT OF IT JOHNNY! WE'RE HERE.
HUH?
POLICE
DAYDREAMING AGAIN, PARTNER?
DAY AND NIGHT, SWEETHEART.

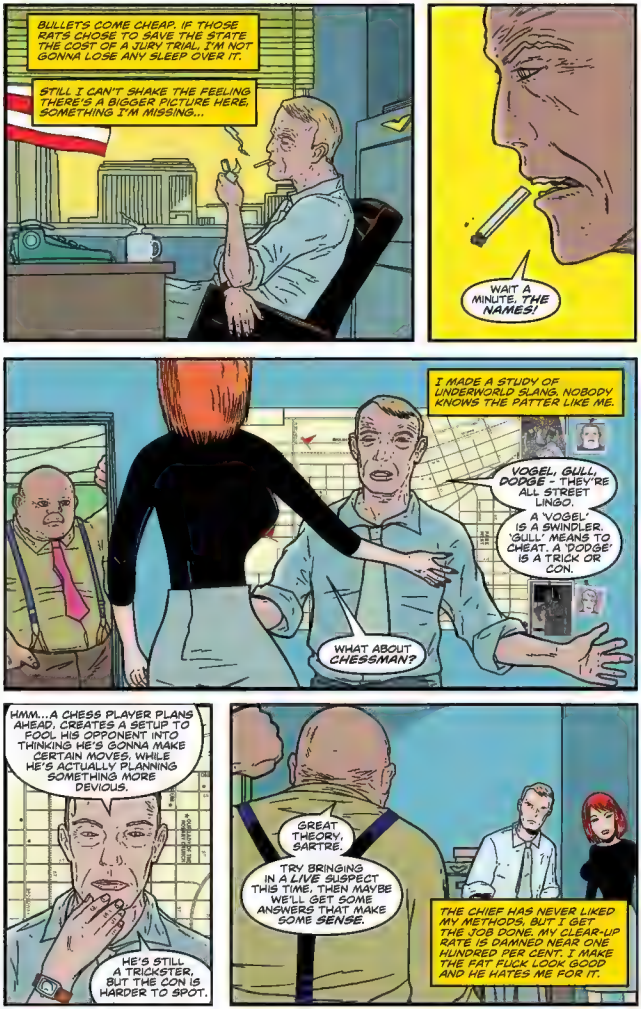

NULLEPART CA
CEMETERY
SOMETHING IS OUT OF WHACK, GINGER.

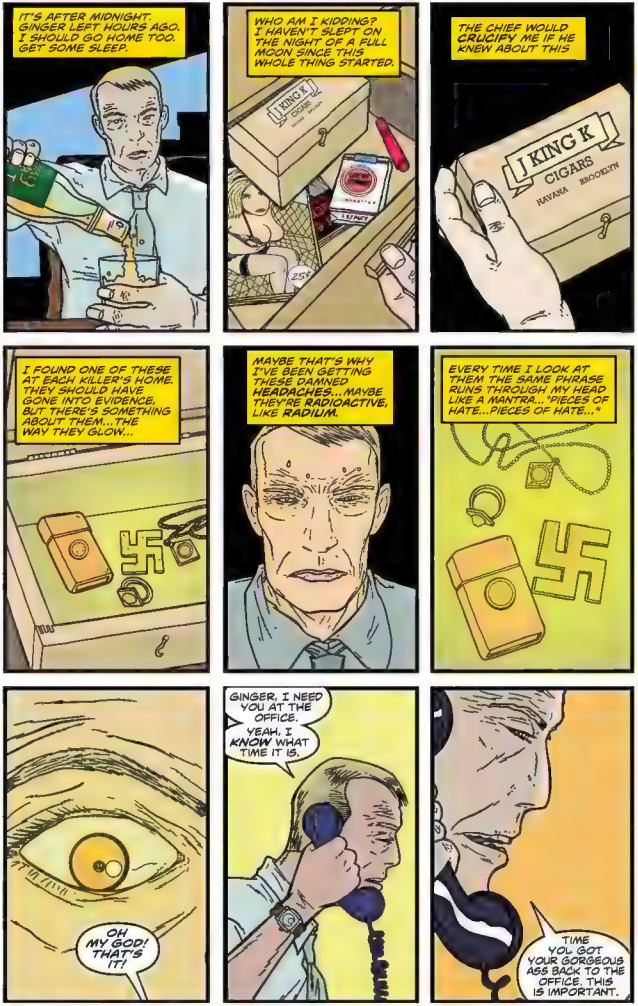

CEMETERY
THE DATE?
AND NO REPLACEMENT HEAD.

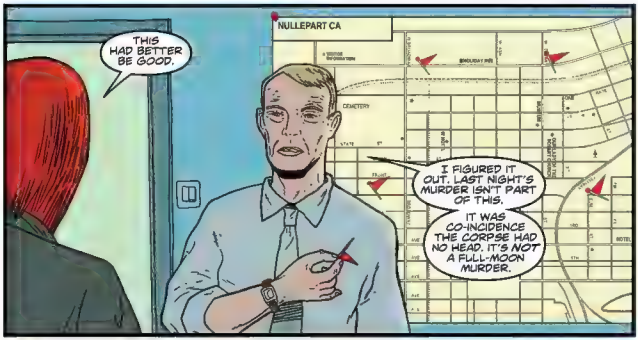
EITHER THE PATTERN IS CHANGING OR THE KILLER WAS INTERRUPTED. MAYBE HE WASN'T PLANNING FOR US TO FIND THE BODY UNTIL TOMORROW.

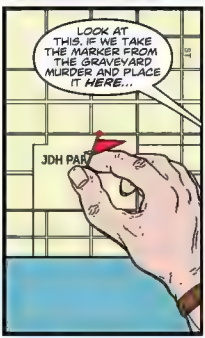
THE CRAZIEST THING ABOUT THESE MURDERS...WE NAILED THE PERP EACH TIME. FOUR SLAYINGS, FOUR KILLERS. BUT WE NEVER WOULD HAVE FOUND THEM WITHOUT OUR MYSTERIOUS INFORMANT.
AFTER EACH MURDER, THERE WAS AN ANONYMOUS TIP-OFF IN THE MAIL TO YOURS TRULY.


FINDING THEM WAS A LEAD-PIPE CINCH. MAKING AN ARREST WAS A WHOLE OTHER BALLGAME.
THEY ALL HAD A DEATH WISH. WHEN WE TRACKED THEM DOWN, EVERY ONE OF THEM WENT FOR A WEAPON... FORCED ME TO TAKE THEM OUT THE HARD WAY.
FESTUS VOGEL
JEREMY GULL...
.STANLEY CHESSMAN.
....MICHAEL DODGE. .


BULLETS COME CHEAP. IF THOSE RATS CHOSE TO SAVE THE STATE THE COST OF A JURY TRIAL, I'M NOT GONNA LOSE ANY SLEEP OVER IT.
STILL I CAN'T SHAKE THE FEELING THERE'S A BIGGER PICTURE HERE. SOMETHING I'M MISSING...
WAIT A MINUTE, THE NAMES!
I MADE A STUDY OF UNDERWORLD SLANG. NOBODY KNOWS THE PATTER LIKE ME.
VOGEL, GULL, DODGE - THEY'RE ALL STREET LINGO.
A 'VOGEL' IS A SWINDLER. 'GULL' MEANS TO CHEAT. A 'DODGE' IS A TRICK OR CON.
WHAT ABOUT CHESSMAN?
HMM...A CHESS PLAYER PLANS AHEAD, CREATES A SETUP TO FOOL HIS OPPONENT INTO THINKING HE'S GONNA MAKE CERTAIN MOVES. WHILE HE'S ACTUALLY PLANNING SOMETHING MORE DEVIOUS.
HE'S STILL A TRICKSTER, BUT THE CON IS HARDER TO SPOT.
GREAT THEORY, SARTRE.
TRY BRINGING IN A LIVE SUSPECT THIS TIME, THEN MAYBE WE'LL GET SOME ANSWERS THAT MAKE SOME SENSE.
THE CHIEF HAS NEVER LIKED MY METHODS, BUT I GET THE JOB DONE. MY CLEAR-UP RATE IS DAMNED NEAR ONE HUNDRED PER CENT. I MAKE THE RAT FUCK LOOK GOOD AND HE HATES ME FOR IT.


IT'S AFTER MIDNIGHT. GINGER LEFT HOURS AGO. I SHOULD GO HOME TOO. GET SOME SLEEP.
WHO AM I KIDDING? I HAVEN'T SLEPT ON THE NIGHT OF A FULL MOON SINCE THIS WHOLE THING STARTED.
J KING K CIGARS
THE CHIEF WOULD CRUCIFY ME IF HE KNEW ABOUT THIS
J KING K CIGARS HAVANA BROOKLYN
I FOUND ONE OF THESE AT EACH KILLER'S HOME. THEY SHOULD HAVE GONE INTO EVIDENCE, BUT THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT THEM...THE WAY THEY GLOW...
MAYBE THAT'S WHY I'VE BEEN GETTING THESE DAMNED HEADACHES...MAYBE THEY'RE RADIOACTIVE, LIKE RADIUM.
EVERY TIME I LOOK AT THEM THE SAME PHRASE RUNS THROUGH MY HEAD LIKE A MANTRA..."PIECES OF HATE...PIECES OF HATE..."
OH MY GOD! THAT'S IT!
GINGER, I NEED YOU AT THE OFFICE.
YEAH, I KNOW WHAT TIME IT IS.
TIME YOU GOT YOUR GORGEOUS ASS BACK TO THE OFFICE. THIS IS IMPORTANT.

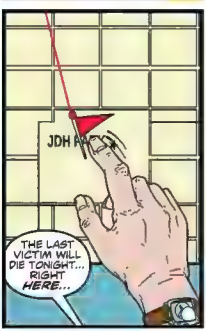

THIS HAD BETTER BE GOOD.
NULLEPART CA
CEMETERY
I FIGURED IT OUT. LAST NIGHT'S MURDER ISN'T PART OF THIS.
IT WAS CO-INCIDENCE THE CORPSE HAD NO HEAD. IT'S NOT A FULL-MOON MURDER.


LOOK AT THIS. IF WE TAKE THE MARKER FROM THE GRAVEYARD MURDER AND PLACE IT HERE...
JDH PARK

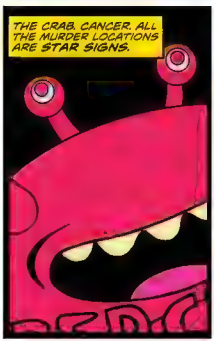
NOW JOIN THE LINES...

A PENTAGRAM! YOU THINK THIS IS SATANIC?
IT'S A STAR, GINGER. STAR, MOON. ALL OF THIS RELATES TO...I DON'T KNOW... ASTRONOMY...ASTROLOGY...

SPACE. DEEP SPACE. THE HATE THAT COMES FROM-
WE HAVE TO TELL THE CHIEF.
NO! YOU KNOW HOW HE IS. HE OPERATES BY THE BOOK AND WE DON'T HAVE TIME FOR THAT.


JDH PARK
THE LAST VICTIM WILL DIE TONIGHT... RIGHT HERE...

"...THE JIMMY DRAKE HEPCAT THEME PARK!"
ARE YOU SURE ABOUT THIS? THE PLACE IS DESERTED.
WHERE'S THE KILLER?
WHERE'S THE VICTIM?
THIS IS IT.
EVERYTHING IS FALLING INTO PLACE
GRAPE APE
T
R
E
X
RED CR
ADAMSK


THE CRAB. CANCER. ALL THE MURDER LOCATIONS ARE STAR SIGNS.

THE FISH RESTAURANT... PISCES, THE RAM NIGHT-CLUB - ARIES, THE WHITE BULL MOTEL - TAURUS, AND...OH MY GOD...

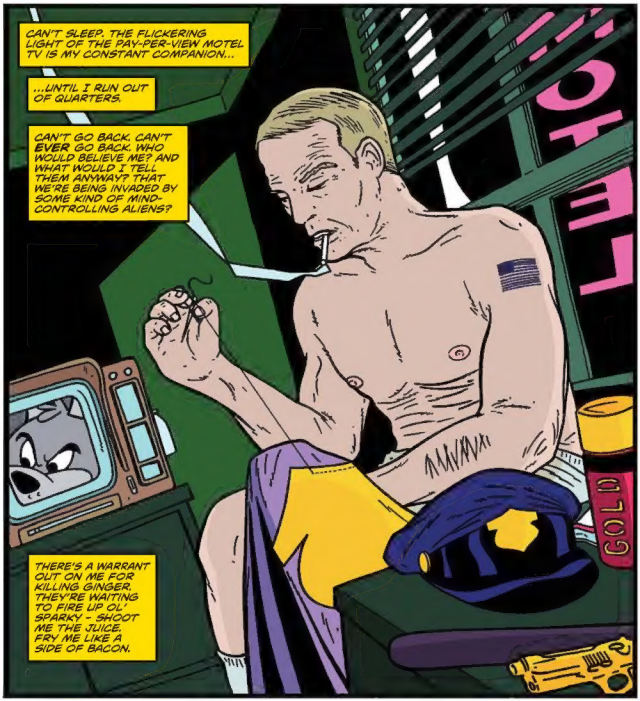
...THE MIRROR - MY TWIN - GEMINI -

YOU DON'T THINK MAYBE YOU'RE PLACING TOO MUCH IMPORTANCE ON THESE SO-CALLED LINKS?
GINGER
IT WIT'S ME THEN
I SHOULD HAVE SEEN IT BEFORE, BUT I COULDN'T SEE PAST THE GIRL OF MY DREAMS.
GINGER PALMER.
THE CHIEF'S RIGHT. THAT THING WITH THE NAMES.
IT IS KIND OF FAR FETCHED.
THE AMERICAN CRIME WRITER'S DICTIONARY OF AUTHENTIC UNDERWORLD SLANG DEFINES A 'PALMER' AS...
"...FROM THE ART OF LEGERDEMAIN, OR SLEIGHT OF HAND, THE PALMING OF THE COIN...
..A CHEAT OR THIEF
MAYBE YOU'VE BEEN WORKING THIS CASE TOO HARD.
"...A LIAR!"
MAYBE WE SHOULD CALL IT A NIGHT

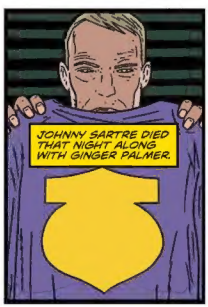
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
CHECKING MY WEAPON. IF THE KILLER'S HERE, I WANT TO BE READY FOR HIM.
JEEZUS!
IT'S ME!
I'M THE NEXT VICTIM!
IT MAKES SENSE NOW... ALL THAT TIME SHE SPENT IN THE CHIEF'S OFFICE.
THE WAY THEY CHANGED THE SUBJECT WHEN I WALKED IN ON THEM.
I'VE BEEN SET UP, GINGER... THE CHIEF... THEY'RE BOTH IN ON IT
WHO ELSE?
HOW BIG IS THIS?
WHO ARE THEY?
WHAT DO THEY WANT?
ARE THEY EVEN HUMAN?!

THE MOON...IT LOOKS LIKE A POCKMARKED SKULL...
...GAZING DOWN IN BALEFUL DISAPPROVAL OF OUR NOCTURNAL ACTIVITIES...
MIND IF I SMOKE?
JOHNNY, YOU'RE ACTING WEIRD.
WHAT'S WRONG?
NOTHING.
NOT A DAMN' THING.
YOU'RE SHAKING LIKE A LEAF. ARE YOU SICK?
MY GOD! YOU'RE BURNING UP!
THIS IS IT. SHE'S DISTRACTING ME
GETTING IN CLOSE MAKING SURE SHE CAN'T MISS...
BLAMM

J-JOHNNY...
...WHY...
I'M SORRY, BABY. I COULDN'T LET YOU DO IT.
IT'S BEST THIS WAY. I DON'T KNOW WHAT KIND OF HOLD THEY HAD OVER YOU.
Y-YOU CRAZY... BASTARD...
BLAMM BLAMM
BLAMM BLAMM
SWEET GINGER... YOU'RE FREE NOW.


CAN'T SLEEP. THE FLICKERING LIGHT OF THE PAY-PER-VIEW MOTEL TV IS MY CONSTANT COMPANION...
...UNTIL I RUN OUT OF QUARTERS.
CAN'T GO BACK. CAN'T EVER GO BACK. WHO WOULD BELIEVE ME? AND WHAT WOULD I TELL THEM ANYWAY? THAT WE'RE BEING INVADED BY SOME KIND OF MIND-CONTROLLING ALIENS?
THERE'S A WARRANT OUT ON ME FOR KILLING GINGER. THEY'RE WAITING TO FIRE UP OL' SPARKY - SHOOT ME THE JUICE. FRY ME LIKE A SIDE OF BACON.
LEHIGH
GOLD

AIN'T GONNA HAPPEN.


JOHNNY SARTRE DIED THAT NIGHT ALONG WITH GINGER PALMER.

FROM NOW ON I WALK THE DEAD BEAT.

MY BATTLE AGAINST THE FORCES OF EVIL WILL CONTINUE.
ON THE STREETS, IN THE SHADOWS, WHEREVER EVIL BREEDS, I'LL BE THERE...
...THE SHIELD OF JUSTICE!
THE BEGINNING...

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The Nao Of Brown

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